

ASAPH

BY

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ASAPH;

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BY

ALICE KINGSBURY COOLEY.
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TO
MRS. MARGARET E CROCKER,
THE FRIEND OF LITERATURE AND ART,
THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR,
ALICE KINGSBURY COOLY.

ASAPH.

CHAPTER I.

AN OFFERING TO MOLOCH.

JERUSALEM lay golden in the sun—a thing of beauty standing high upon her hills for all the world to see, to love, to worship. A soft haze hung over her, as it were the Protecting cloud, diffused and softened, reaching to her furthest gates, that all her thrice-blessed children might know that Jehovah still was near, that His love, though bruised and hurt, still clung to His chosen people.

The streets and houses were decorated for a great festival. The people attired in magnificent garments of purple, scarlet, blue, and gold, profusely embroidered: the women with veils, golden head-pieces, nose-rings, bracelets, tinkling anklets, and strings of precious ornaments completely covering their breasts; the maidens and children in pure white intertwined with wreaths and flowers and trailing vines, were all wending their way to join in the great procession, for this was a day of rejoicing. King Jehoiakim's beautiful young wife* had safely borne him a daughter, and there was to be an offering given to the

* Among the Hebrews the mother of the king was termed the queen.

great god Moloch by way of thanks, and for intercession and protection for the new-born princess.

It was to be no common offering, taken from its too willing parents' arms, that through its immolation honor might accrue to them.

No, it was to be the most beautiful child in Jerusalem, nay, in all Judea—a boy fairer yet than any the sun had ever shone on, a descendant of the “sons of God,” with a complexion so radiant and hair so long and golden that people wondered and turned thrice to look at him even in the most crowded streets.

The imperious powerful high priest of Moloch, hearing of the boy, had visited the rich widow Helah, the wife of Tola, in magnificent state, with an imposing retinue. When he saw the boy his eyes sparkled and the blood suffused his dusky face.

“Ah, what will not the great Moloch do for me for such an offering!” he thought, so he unbended from his dignity, and became so soft so persuasive that the boy was fascinated and willingly consented to embrace the great god. The victim must be willing, else the sacrifice would be in vain.

The mother was terror-stricken at her child's consenting, and was as one made dumb.

When the great day arrived the boy was taken from her arms, and she followed like a pale cold statue.

The procession moved: first came the mounted guard of Moloch, in golden armor, ruthlessly riding down those who in the least obstructed their way, then came the musicians in beautiful vestments, playing on the instru-

ments that King David had invented for the Temple service. The music was inspiring—so martial, so grand, that the “offering” was in ecstasy. Next came the priests, riding in the golden chariots of the sun, in robes so magnificent that increase of splendor seemed impossible, yet when the high priest of Moloch appeared, borne aloft on a resplendent throne, the grandeur of these lesser ones sunk into insignificance.

Now came the “offering,” robed in simple white, with limbs and neck uncovered, that all might see their wondrous beauty, a wreath of golden sunflowers in his hair and trailing to his feet. His face was glorified; and as he turned his eyes to heaven he seemed as if he had but just left that abode of angels.

Next came King Jehoiakim—young, handsome, but haughty, and with a cruel look upon his face. He was dressed in the utmost splendor, as were those of his retinue who surrounded him. Then came the princes and the rulers, then the fighting men of Judah, men of magnificent physique and courage; the nobles and heads of families followed, interspersed with standard-bearers, whose highly colored and gilded insignia of the different tribes added to the beauty of the whole; then followed the people dressed in holiday attire—the maidens bearing cakes, the youths golden vases of wine.

The procession ascended the broad walls by a temporary bridge erected for the occasion.

As it neared the Gate of the Fountain the music increased in inspiring grandeur, and the voices of the men and women singers filled the air with delicious melody.

The trappings of the stately camels glistened in the sun; the golden armor of the guards threw back a million rays; the precious ornaments of the women reflected the glory of their "god" in innumerable bright colors; and Moloch's high priest was almost hidden by the blaze of his many jewels, and the "offering," in his simplicity, appeared more transcendently beautiful by contrast.

Suddenly the silver trumpets sounded loudly, and the procession countermarched on the broad wall. It was indeed a pageant of which any city might well be proud.

Slowly it descended the incline prepared expressly by the stairs that led up to the city of David, then it passed through the Fountain Gate, over the bridge, into the valley of Hinnon.

The sun, whom they worshiped under the form of Moloch and of Baal, seemed to smile on this magnificent paraphernalia of their devotion to him, and rose higher and higher in the heavens, and brighter and warmer became his rays; and as a cloud that momentarily obscured his light passed from his face the vast multitude broke out in joyous shouts and song, the earth trembled with the sound, and the walls of Jerusalem repeated the glad cries and songs and sent them back from every angle and every tower till the whole valley was full of triumphant melody.

The procession approached the grove in a long sinuous line, like a great golden serpent flashing in the sun. As it neared the place of sacrifice, it divided into two immense masses, leaving a wide passage for the "offering."

For a moment the music died down to a plaintive wail, then the most magnificent of the golden "chariots of the

sun," drawn by a line of glorious milk-white horses, slowly carried the boy Asaph through the expectant multitude.

Suddenly from the walls of the king's garden, that projected so far into the valley that the dying cries of the "offerings" could be plainly heard, a priest sounded the silver trumpet loud and long; the immense, exquisitely embroidered curtains of the grove were drawn aside, and there stood the two great towers of fire, blazing out on every side, and flaring far up into the air.

The high priest approached the chariot. Asaph stepped to the ground and made obeisance by touching the earth with his forehead; the priest took his hand, and, speaking to him softly, led him nearer to the fires; suddenly the music burst out in all its grandeur, and the "tophs" or drums were added, sounding loudly.

Asaph advanced fearlessly; the high priest laid his hand upon his head, and he was ready for the sacrifice. Hundreds of priests swung high their glittering golden censers, filling the air with dense clouds of aromatic perfume; the maidens placed their cakes on little altars to be consumed by the fierce fires; the youths poured out their libations of wine to be lapped up by the flames; louder and louder sung the singers, deeper rolled the drums.

The music had reached its utmost glory and the multitude was burning with religious frenzy when suddenly a woman's voice rang high above all other sounds:

"Stay the sacrifice! The 'offering' is impure! He will pollute your altars; he is not the child of my dead husband. I—am—an—adulteress!"

Simultaneously the inner curtains were drawn aside,

and the hideous figure of Moloch, with his great calf's head, stood revealed. Asaph hesitated with a look of horror. The high priest urged him forward as fresh fuel was thrown upon the braziers; the flames burst out with greater fierceness, caught his golden hair, and touched his tender cheek; he heard his mother's cry, and with a shriek of agony he rushed into her arms.

She turned and fled. For a moment the multitude was silent with astonishment; but the high priest trembled with his rage.

"The sacrifice so near completed, and yet— Stone the impious adulteress! Stone them!" he cried, and the vast multitude took up the cry.

"Stone them! Stone them!" And fast and furious flew the cruel stones to avenge the insult to their slighted god.

But the widow Helah fled toward the thorn bushes that grew high above her head, but her large and strong widow's veil, spreading in her flight, caught upon the thorns, and was held there fast and firm.

"Aha! thus does the great Moloch avenge his honor!" cried the high priest, exultantly. And the multitude took up the cry.

"For the great Moloch's honor!" and the stones were larger, and flew faster, and struck harder.

At length even the fury of the high priest was spent, and gradually the shower of stones grew less; then as silence fell upon the multitude, it entirely ceased.

As their frenzy cooled, pity began to arise in some of their breasts; the soft god-like sentiment rarely ever

touched the iron hearts of these men of war whose hands had been steeped in blood nearly ever since they had first entered the Promised Land.

But Asaph was the fairest child in Jerusalem, and they dreaded to tear the veil aside and to see his perfect form, his golden hair, his glorious beauty bathed in blood and lifeless from their cruel fury, so they hesitated, then approached nearer, paused, advanced again; still no one dared to draw the veil aside.

Nearer and nearer they came—no sound was heard, not even a groan from the victim nor a moan from the mother. Nearer and nearer—the tension of their nerves was terrific.

At length the high priest, to break the spell, put his hand upon the veil; in a moment he had torn it from the detaining thorns, and there upon the cruel rocks was—nothing!

A sigh of relief went up from the people. Then the high priest cried:

“She has escaped! The impious adulteress!” and a mighty shout of mingled rage and joy rent the air.

CHAPTER II.

JERUSALEM.

NIGHT had fallen on Jerusalem—soft, radiant, glorious. The excitement of the day had been intense. Many opposing sentiments had been evoked by the priests' proceedings—fury, malice, pity, sympathy, and condemnation—for there were still many who clung to the old faith in the god of their fathers, the mighty Jehovah; their curses on the idolaters were deep and strong, but being few in comparison to the vast multitude who had gone astray, they grieved in secret, and put dust and ashes on their heads and rent their garments for the sins of their brothers.

The populace, excited by the high priest and his satellites, had done dastardly work on their return from the grove, and had the widow and Asaph fallen into their hands their lives had not been worth a hair's value.

The magnificent stairway built by Solomon, which had so astonished the Queen of Sheba “that there was no more heart in her,” that led down from the city of David into the Tyropean Valley, then up again to the Temple mount, and once only was used by the kings and princes, had been crowded by early morning, until the stars shone, by those of the peaceably inclined citizens and strangers who wished to see somewhat of the progress of events, yet to keep themselves from any entanglement therein. Yet they too

were excited and anxious, not knowing what wild deeds the mob might do led on by the baffled, infuriated priests of Moloch.

Jeremiah had called again and again to the people from the new gate of the Temple, but they had only laughed and answered him with jeers.

The vacant places by the gates, where the kings were wont to receive petitions and sit in judgment, had been filled most of the day by strangers drawn hither to be present at the ceremonies of worship, and to enjoy the bounty of the king, his “sacrifices” of bread and wine and fruit that were freely furnished to all.

Here they had gossiped and eat their meat, drinking wine and water out of graceful jugs and vases; the water they had drawn from the beautiful pools and fountains that were scattered over the city.

But now those who had come from a distance had gone to their tents outside the walls, and those who lived near had returned to their own cities or villages, and at last the citizens themselves had retired to their houses—those who lived in the deep valleys, of which there were several in Jerusalem—to pass the night upon their roofs to catch what breeze they could, those who lived on the pleasanter heights to sleep in-doors.

The gates of Jerusalem were closed and firmly locked for the night. Peace settled down upon her people, and only the watchmen on her walls were awake, and cried:

“All’s well!”

CHAPTER III.

ASAPH AND HIS MOTHER.

HELAH had stopped the sacrifice, being frantic with agony and fear at the thought of losing her loved boy—her all; but when he was in her arms again she knew no fear of priest or god, thought only of escape and life for her child; so when the thorns caught her in her flight, she quickly detached the veil from her head, and left it hanging there—the thought flashing through her mind how it might deceive and delay her pursuers.

Under its cover she penetrated further and further into the thicket, scratched and bleeding, but safe; she did not pause for fatigue—a mother's love gave her strength to carry the heavy boy.

Further and further up the valley she pushed her way till the voices at the grove died into silence, and she having passed the rock-hewn tombs was in a part frequented only by the birds and beasts of the forests; then she paused.

Asaph, though fearless and of glorious courage, was still little more than a babe in years, and bodily pain caused him the same anguish as it would another child of such a tender age, so he moaned pitifully:

“My mother! oh, my mother! the pain! the pain!”

For the first time she looked at his face—a cruel burn

extending from his temple to the turning of his chin. She uttered a smothered groan.

“Hush, my boy! let us be silent that the cruel priests may not find us. ‘Sh! I will assuage thy pain.” She laid him on the soft mossy earth, and going to the brook Kedron that rushes swiftly down the valley, she found a little pool made by the spray, where the waters were at rest and soft grass grew at its edge; she gathered a handful and saturating it with the cool water, she hastened to Asaph, and bound it on his face. This she did again and again, until he fell into a deep slumber, broken by quivering sobs, as when a child falls to sleep crying.

Helah took off her heavy skirt and wrapped it around the boy, then sitting down herself, she thought what it would be wisest to do for their safety; go back to Jerusalem she dared not. She knew the vindictive spirits of the priests of Moloch and of Baal would cause them to hunt her from the face of the earth; she even feared for her relatives and friends, lest the priests, baffled of wreaking their vengeance on her, should turn and rend them.

So she sat thinking, thinking, till the shadows grew longer and longer; then night fell and she was safe for the present. Her heart was glad, and would have given thanks, but her belief in Moloch had received such a shock of horror that she could not frame a prayer to such a cruel god.

Hunger now made itself felt—for she had eaten scarcely anything since she had known her boy was doomed; so the pains were sharp and cutting.

She arose and looked about her; the very tree against

which she had been leaning was full of ripe figs. She could easily reach those on the lower branches, and never did food taste so delicious.

When she had satisfied her hunger and drunk from the brook, she wrapped herself in her mantle and laid down by her child.

Sleep, thou tenderest of all Jehovah's gifts to man, who can sufficiently sing thy praise?

Pain, anguish, sorrow, and despair are soothed into oblivion by its gentle touch; and the beggar lying on the cold marble steps and the king in his ivory bed are thus made equal.

For awhile Helah was the happy mother, back again in Jerusalem, in her beautiful home, with kindred and friends around her. Little Asaph, too, felt no more the agony of his burning, and the quivering sobs finally died away, and they both slept.

But grim anguish ever hovers on the border-land of dreams, ready to grasp the unhappy the moment gentle sleep relaxes her sweet vigilance; so it was with Helah: while the stars yet shone she awoke to the knowledge of all her misery.

The child still slept. What should she do? where go? Alas! she had no one to counsel her, not even a god to whom she could pray. Moloch had become abhorrent to her very soul, and Jehovah, the God of her childhood, was so far off and so dreadful that she dared not approach to Him even in thought—she feared lest He should blaze forth in a consuming fire, like her fathers had feared before her in Mount Horeb, when Moses stood between them

and the Lord, lest His glory should blast them. So, having neither god nor man to turn to, that wonderful instinct, planted in all female kind, from the smallest bird to the great behemoth, from the rudest savage to her most enlightened sister, that rich pathetic gift, mother-love, supplied all other needs.

She suddenly thought, with a stab of pain, of Asaph's tender feet; no shoes, no covering for his dainty limbs, only the little frail white robe to protect him from the thorns and briars, and the close-woven thickets in which they must now make their home.

“His dear little feet that I have kissed so often, they will be bruised and bleeding, cut by sharp stones and torn by cruel briars! And how shall I protect his body from the scorching sun and the fierce wind, and how provide his food, the dainty one? Oh, how shall I let him die for lack of the pure white milk!” and she moaned and wrung her hands.

Asaph awoke at the sound, and cried:

“Oh, my mother, I have had such a bad dream! but—but”—then he trembled and put his hand to his face—“oh, how it pains!”

“Let thy mother soothe it. Thon wilt not be afraid to stay alone till I go to yonder brook?”

“Nay, I do not fear; but bring me water too, my mother, for I thirst.”

Helah hastened to the Kedron and gathered handfuls of soft grass, and moistened it; but how to carry water? no shell was here, or vase, or cup, or even broken shred of

pottery. She looked around as the faint light stole from the east, but not even a hollow stone was near.

Ah, her shoe! Her heart leaped with joy that in her sorrow she had thrown off her dainty sandals and fine clothes and put on the garments of them that mourn. Quickly she dipped the little boat-shaped leather shoe into the brook and filled it with clear cold water. Then hastening to her boy she said:

“Drink, Asaph, it will cool the fever of thy hurt.”

“’Tis good, my mother,” he said, when he had drunk till none remained.

Then Helah bound the damp grass on his poor burned cheek, biting her lips that no moan should escape to aggravate his sufferings.

“Why was it, my mother? what had I done? had I not gone with joy to embrace the great god? Then why did the priest urge me to go through those cruel fires to that hideous thing?”

“Hush—’sh! my boy!” cried Helah, “lest the great Moloch hear and punish thee.”

“Mother, it was not alive; it did not move even at my cry of pain and thine of anguish.”

“’Sh—’sh!” she whispered, pressing him to her breast. “Let us not speak of him lest the four winds carry our words to his ears, and in his anger he should deliver us into the hands of the cruel priests.”

That silenced Asaph; for since the horrible yesterday the form of the high priest of Moloch was the impersonation of all that was dire and awful to his young imagination.

“See, my darling, here are sweet fresh figs; eat but a little—then we will go.”

“Home, my mother?”

“Nay; wouldst thou fall again into the hands of them who are eager to slay thee? We will find some secure cave in the friendly wilderness where no man cometh, and there we will live, my son.”

Then Helah rent a portion from her heavy mantle and covered Asaph as with a robe, and secured it with the jeweled pins that fastened her own clothes underneath her mourning garments.

After again partaking of the ripe figs, she tied a few in the corner of her mantle, then carried Asaph to the brook, where they drank of the water, then purified themselves, and so were ready for their journey. They went toward the setting sun into the rocky wilderness to the west of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IV.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

ASAPH tried courageously to suppress the moans of pain, but though descended from the sons of God, the human nature of his mother's blood asserted itself so strongly that ever and anon the sobs would come, and his mother's heart felt his every pain intensified.

"Let me walk, my mother. I know thy arms have grown weary with my weight," Asaph said as soon as they were in the thicket again, with the great trees all about them.*

"Yes, my child, we will rest." So they sat down on the soft moss, and the birds fluttered above their heads, and sung so sweetly that the sounds soothed them as the music of the Temple in Hehah's childhood had quieted all her maiden sorrows.

For awhile they sat speechless; both were thinking—Asaph in his childish way of the immediate past, she of the present, which to her meant her child. Again she took him in her arms and slowly pressed through the thicket. She knew, from the history of her people, that many had hidden themselves in times of trouble in the rocky caves abounding around Jerusalem. She feared to leave Asaph even for a moment to search alone, lest she

* These were not yet destroyed, but they were by the subsequent devastating sieges, of which Jerusalem had many.

should lose sight of him in the heavy undergrowth, or other harm should befall him, so her search was slow and wearisome. She kept near the Kedron so as to moisten the grass on Asaph's cheek and to give him drink, for the burn had caused a fever to arise.

When the sun was high in the heavens, and they were faint from lack of food, she espied an aperture in the rocky hill-side.

“But should there be wild beasts within!” was her thought. “My darling, I will go first and see that there is naught therein to harm thee. Sit there,” and she placed him on the rock that projected over the low entrance. “While I am gone, if thou seest aught, either man or beast, lay close to the earth and draw my mantle over thy head.” Then taking a sharp rock in her hand in case of need, she stooped and entered.

For some distance she could not stand upright; and after leaving the light that streamed in the entrance she was in total darkness, so she proceeded cautiously, feeling every step.

“If I only had a light!” she murmured, growing dizzy with the darkness and hunger. Suddenly she almost fell, for the side wall ended abruptly. “Perhaps an entrance to another cave,” she thought; then stepping back, she passed her hand over the rocky side, and when she came to the end she grasped it firmly, put her head forward, and look and listened. Not a sound—not even the falling of water-drops, but away back in the direction she had come was a faint light entering some crevice from above.

She walked toward it joyfully. It came from an open-

ing almost like a door, which she entered, and found herself in a small cave within a cave, quite light and dry and fresh-smelling. She felt so thankful—but to what? to whom? She had no god now; and the feeling coming back again upon her heart oppressed her with a strange pain.

She looked around. No evidence of man or animal, and so secluded they would be surely safe. She returned by the same way, and her eyes seemed to be able to penetrate the darkness a little better; and she found the aperture without any difficulty; then she counted her steps to the entrance, and in a few moments Asaph was in her arms.

“My son, be not afraid of the darkness. I have found a safe place where we may live, away from these cruel men.”

“I do not fear, dear mother; but I—I am so hungry!” he said, the tears coming into his voice, despite his courage.

“Be patient; wait but a little.”

So she carried him into the cave, counting her steps; then, as they turned into the other, where the light shone, he gave a little cry of joy, and when he entered the room, he smiled and said:

“Now they can not get me; they will be afraid of the dark!”

Rocks projected from the sides and floor that served well for seats and tables. They sat on one.

“See, my boy, here are figs; eat while I fetch thee water. Do not be afraid, even if I am absent longer than

thou wishest, and do not attempt to follow me—thou mightest be hurt in yonder black cave. I will search for food for thee. Eat, then try to sleep.”

She covered him with the remnant of her mantle, kissed him tenderly, then cautiously felt her way back into the valley.

For a moment she shaded her eyes with her hand and stood thinking. Suddenly she remembered a beautiful garden outside of Jerusalem that she had often visited when a maiden, the possessor being a distant relative of hers. She remembered the kind law that the God of her fathers had given to the great Moses—that the trees should not be beaten bare, nor the vines left empty, nor the corn stripped wholly from the fields—she remembered, too, that all growing things for food were free to those who hungered, but not to take away save that which was left on purpose.

So, cautiously but as quickly as she could, she hastened toward this garden of life. She stopped ever and anon and listened, for the sound of music in the valley would have deterred her from her purpose, and Asaph might die of hunger.

No sound save the brambles crunching beneath her feet; she almost held her breath as she neared the awful grove; she was faint with hunger and fear; but the thought of the pleasant garden and food for herself and child nerved her on. Peering through the thicket she saw her large strong widow's veil—if she could but obtain it, she could carry food for several days, and use it, too, for warmth at night.

Down on her hands and knees she crept nearer and nearer; still no sound from the grove. It was almost within her grasp when the bushes at her side parted with a sharp noise. She pressed closely to the earth and held her breath.

“Asaph!” she murmured as she closed her eyes, expecting death.

Several seconds passed—they seemed like hours, but no voice sounded, then a little moist nose just touched her cheek; it was a little goat with its kid by its side.

Ah! here was food and life for Asaph could she but coax it to the cave; then she could return at night to the garden. She touched it very gently on the head; it started; she spoke a few soft words, then approached the kid very cautiously, and grasped it suddenly and firmly; then snatching her veil up from the ground she hastened back to the cave with the kid in her arms, the mother following, crying “Ma-a! ma-a!” but she plucked a few sweet leaves from a tree in her path and held them out to the goat, who, seeing no harm was done her kid, eat them, then followed on.

When they arrived at the cave the goat refused to enter; so Helah sat down and let it see its young, then smoothed its long beautiful hair and spoke to it gently, then taking off her leather belt from around her waist, she quickly fastened it around its neck, and drew it after her.

The goat struggled fiercely; but Helah gained sudden strength; this was life for her child, nay, for herself as well; so she held it firmly, and with coaxing and petting

she finally brought it to the inner cave, speaking as she came so that Asaph should not be frightened.

He had been dozing, but sat up on hearing his mother's voice.

“ Oh! the pretty creature!” he cried. “ Let me touch her, my mother.”

She led the goat to his side and bade him hold her fast; then taking off her shoe she quickly filled it with the pure white life-giving fluid. Asaph looked on in wonder; but when it was held to his lips he drank it with delight, saying:

“ Oh, my mother, how good that is! Now dost thou drink some, thou wilt like it too.” So Helah drank and her strength returned, and they both felt better.

Now to make the cave secure to keep the goat till it should be tamed, to pile up rocks and fill the entrance would be a difficult, heavy task, and she was weak. So after thinking for awhile she tore some strips from her widow's veil and fastened them near together across the opening. Then she went into the valley, and gathering grass and leaves, she filled the veil and bore it back into the cave.

“ Here is food for the little goat, and soft leaves for thy bed, dear son; I will get more from the valley, so that we both can sleep without feeling the cold, hard rocks.” But Asaph was drowsy, and his cheeks red with fever. What should she do? Placing him upon a bed of leaves upon a large projecting rock, she sat by him and held his hand. Yes, as soon as night descended she would go to the garden and bring the cooling pomegranate and the

sweet healing balm of Gilead. Would not the leaves laid on her boy's face make it well? The thought gave her joy, so she hastened into the valley again and brought in leaves enough to make them both comfortable for the night.

By this time the sun was sinking and the whole valley was lighted up with a glorious, refulgent light of purple crimson and gold—so beautiful that the sight gave even her sad heart a thrill of pleasure; then as it gradually faded away and the stars began to shine, she set out on her errand. The thought of danger did not present itself; it was life and health for her child that she was to secure; to do so quickly was all her thought.

She knew the gates of Jerusalem were closed at dark, so no man would interfere with her purpose. She took her way by the margin of the brook, as here she could go swiftly, no bushes impeding her way. Should the watchmen on the walls notice her, she would not be harmed, as they would take her for some denizen of the wilderness, and Jehovah's chosen people were not swift to shed blood—at least, that of animals.

She ran till her breath grew short, then rested for a moment and listened, but not a sound broke the stillness, save the watchmen on the towers, who cried ever and anon:

“All's well!”

The lights from the houses and the streets, and from the many-windowed palaces, filled the air above the palaces, filled the atmosphere above the city with a faint radiance. Helah's heart yearned over Jerusalem, her home, where she was born; where her father had served in the

Temple in the reign of the good Josiah; where her childish voice had joined in praises to Israel's God. Her eyes filled with tears; she must not think of these things; her child was waiting. On she went again, eagerly scanning every object, so as not to miss her destination.

At length she came to the stone inclosure of the garden. The beautiful trees drooped over the sides, and the vines trailed among the stones. She entered the opening, shielded but by a few bars, then she satisfied her hunger at any tree she desired, as the law was, then she looked among them for those already gathered, to glean the portion left for the poor.

Soon she had filled her veil with apples, figs, melons, pomegranates, lettuce, leeks, and olives; then she took a bunch of the precious balm of Gilead, and then hastened back to her boy.

Only that she had observed all the surroundings of the cave and placed stones here and there, as signs, she would never have been able to find it again, with only the stars as torches; but her mother-love had served her a projector, purveyor, and guide. She was a woman, so her heart beat a little faster and her knees trembled slightly as she entered the dark cave.

Darkness is fearful, like unto death; one enters into what one knows not of; but Helah banished every other thought but of her child, and hastened in. She had filled her shoe with water, so stepped lightly to save her foot from hurt.

As she neared the inner cave, weary with her load, she murmured softly:

“Asaph!” But he did not reply, and soon his gentle breathing told that he slept.

The little goat cried “Ma-a, ma-a!” so she gave it some fruit, and it lay down to sleep with its kid. Then she placed her treasures on a high projecting rock, to be out of their reach, then lying down by Asaph’s side, she drew the thick veil over them both, and watching the stars that shed a faint light through the rift in the cave, she, too, went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE LIFE IN THE CAVE.

ONCE or twice during the night Asaph had moaned, and Helah had given him water to drink, and had moistened the grass upon his face.

When morning came his fever was less, and both felt refreshed and stronger for their food and sleep.

After she had purified herself at the brook and drank of its cool waters, she carried some to Asaph, who did the same; then she milked the little goat, letting it eat the while. It was almost a kid itself, with beautiful long hair, and so tame that Helah thought it must be of the stock of the scapegoat that was yearly led into the wilderness to bear away the sins of Israel into the wilds where no man liveth.

The milk alone sufficed for Asaph's "meat" in the early morning, but she showed him the pleasant fruits she had brought, of which he might eat as the day grew older; then he smiled with pleasure. But the burn still pained so cruelly that his winsome ways had left him, and his smile was only momentary.

"See, my son, here is precious balm; let me lay it on thy cheek."

So, bruising some of the leaves, she bound them on his face with a strip of her inner garments of white linen.

Soon he fell into a doze, and so she knew the balm had soothed the pain, and that he suffered less.

“What shall I do when he must run about on these hard, sharp rocks—no shoes nor sandals even.”

She had neither needle, thread, nor shears. How should she fashion aught to protect his tender feet? Suddenly she remembered her leather belt; it was broad and strong, but soft withal; so, taking it from her waist, she laid it on a flat stone, then, measuring his foot, she traced out the pattern with a sharp splinter of rock, then she pressed harder and harder, and by dint of patience and persistent effort she at length cut through the leather, and the shoes were ready for the needle. But where should she find anything approaching that useful article? But a thought came; so, going into the valley, she plucked some long, slender thorns, and took them into the cave. These she pierced with one of her strong pins, and threaded with several strands of her long, black hair.

When Asaph awoke, some hours later, and saw his little shoes, he laughed with comic pleasure, as his mother bound his legs with strips from the ever-useful veil; then, when the shoes were drawn upon his feet, he kissed her and said:

“Good, good mother!” and patted her cheek.

God's chosen people were a serious people not much given to light and frivolous amusements. There was little familiarity of speech or action between parent and child, but the greatest ceremony prevailed: children worshiping their parents, that is, bowing to the earth before them, and adults of a lower social condition used the same cere-

mony to those of a higher, or even an equal, standing. If a piece of land was to be bought or sold, the bargain was dignified by the greatest display of politeness.* This all tended to an elevation of language and beautiful poetical idioms of speech, nothing coarse or common ever falling from the lips of an Israelite, man, woman, or child. This is why the little Asaph, even when so young, spoke a pure, courteous language.

With the frequent application of the balm leaves the pain of the burn was so decreased that in a few days Asaph's childish nature asserted itself, and he began to play about the cave and pet and caress the little kid.

He soon had rendered it so tame that it would follow him, but they did not as yet go beyond the limits of the little cave.

Helah went out at night and gleaned what the reapers had left during the day; sometimes the fields were so far distant that it would be midnight before she returned, weary and spent, with her heavy load—she, the delicate woman who had never known what it was to soil her hands with labor or to carry the slightest burden.

But it was only physical fatigue, for what cared she for the foolish pride of the ignominy of work? It was for her child—that feeling nerved her to the most heroic efforts.

Now she must contrive a mill, such as she had seen her bond-maidens use; where stones were so plentiful it was not a difficult matter, but at first she could only beat the wheat and barley into a coarse flour. She gathered dry

* Witness Abraham purchasing the cave of Macphelah.

eaves and branches and ignited them by striking two stones together, and the little cakes cooked in the ashes tasted very grateful after being without any kind of bread for so many days.

As Asaph grew better Helah would take him to the entrance of the cave and let him play in the open air early in the morning and in the evening, when the gates of Jerusalem were closed; so daily he grew stouter and stronger and larger, and the burn healed rapidly—so rapidly that it left an ugly scar, which grieved his mother's heart. If she had only some ointment, or fat even; but how should she kill aught to obtain it—she who almost fainted at the sight of blood; and besides, it would be murder, unless it were brought to the door of the Temple and slain either by one of the priests or in their sight.

Then she thought of the goat's milk. But how let it set to obtain the cream without cup or bowl?

Asaph listened to her murmurings, and a few days after, when they returned from their morning purifications at the Kedron, he said:

“See, my mother, I have made a little cup out of the clay down by the brook; the sun has burned it hard and dry. Will it not do to save the milk? It makes me weep when thou art gone to fetch water to know the sharp rocks might cut thy dear feet on thy return without thy shoes.”

Helah kissed his brow.

“My son, thou art a man in thoughtfulness for thy mother. This cup is more valuable than gold.”

Asaph was happy.

So cream was put upon the scar till it softened and ren-

dered the hard seam less unsightly. Still it drew one side of his face out of its perfect beauty.

A few more days passed, and Asaph had made several cups and bowls, and the cave began to look a little more like a habitation.

Each day added something to their stock. Winter was near, and she must make provision for those cold days when the trees would be bare and the fields bereft of grain.

So, night after night she would return so late that the red streaks were already in the east, and she was foot-sore and weary.

But not a murmur at their hard fate escaped her lips, and if she could have only returned to the worship of the Jehovah of her childhood and had a god to whom to pray and give thanks, she would have been happy, save when she looked on Asaph's scar. But without a god there was always something lacking, and her happiest moments were incomplete.

So the time passed on. Daily she instructed Asaph, as she had done since his earliest infancy, and he was an apt scholar. She missed the cheerful lamp the dark evenings when they could no longer sit at the entrance of the cave and watch and talk of the beautiful moon and stars.

Asaph noticed now that at certain times, when the moon was full, his mother would bow to it, and touch the earth with her forehead, but utter no word.

"Why dost thou so, my mother?" he asked one night.

"She is the queen of heaven, the great Astarte, whom of late we have been taught to worship," Helah replied.

But Asaph looked grave, yet said not a word.

A few nights after he said:

“Astarte is beautiful, my mother, not like the hideous Moloch, but—”

His childish tongue could not frame into speech the thoughts that crowded into his brain, so he sighed and turned away, and ever after, when the moon was full, he would not come from the cave.

Months passed away, and Helah longed to return to Jerusalem, but did not dare to do so, till Asaph should grow up beyond recognition. Only for this yearning the days passed pleasantly enough.

Asaph, with the assistance of his mother, had made him a little bow and arrows, in imitation of the weapons of his father. Helah had strung it with plaited strands of her long hair, and soon he could hit a mark with unerring aim.

“Some day, my mother, I might have to fight for my people, as my father did, but only to save them, my mother.”

One morning, when he was left alone in the valley, while Helah prepared their early meal, he noticed an unclean bird, a hawk, killing the twittering sparrows that had made their homes in the crevices of the rocky entrance, for he fed them each morning; so they had come in great numbers and were very tame, coming at his call. He quickly drew his bow, and the bird lay dead at his feet. He took it to his mother.

“See, it is fat. Will it not make oil for a little lamp?”

Helah examined it and said:

“Yes, my son; I will melt the fat and put it into one

of thy little cups; then with a shred of stuff for a wick, we will have light.”

So the long dark nights were enlivened by its gracious rays, and they would sit and talk. Asaph would ask many questions, storing his mind with the gathered knowledge of his mother's maturer years, or they would mold the clay into articles of use and beauty, and soon a lamp with a handle graced their table of rock.

It was Asaph's task to supply the lamp; so he became very expert in destroying the feathered enemies of his tame birds.

Helah had contrived a way of weaving the feathers into a covering, using her hair as wool; so they did not feel the extreme cold of winter; then, too, the cave was singularly warm and dry.

When the birds proved “clean,” Helah would roast them in a little fire that they kept constantly burning in the cave. She did not fear the smoke would betray them, as so much incense was burned on every high place to propitiate the gods that she knew it would pass unnoticed.

So the winter passed and no news from Jerusalem. Could she remain from her home and kindred much longer? Alas! she must, for Asaph's sake.

The sacrifices in the grove still continued, for Jehoiakim was a cruel man and shed much innocent blood, and Asaph would tremble when he heard the music; and when the drums sounded he would rush into the inner cave and raise his little hands to heaven in speechless entreaty.

CHAPTER VI.

ASAPH INCREASES IN YEARS AND WISDOM.—THE KING
IS TERRIFIED.

As the days passed, the months passed, and so the years glided away.

Their goats had increased to a small flock, and Helah had learned to spin their hair into a beautiful warm cloth. Asaph had made for her a distaff and a rude weaving frame. He had found out a process of curing certain weeds and plants and using them for thread, so that now the cave was covered with soft mats, also the rocky seats, and a large curtain was hung before the entrance.

Under Helah's directions Asaph had made an oven for baking bread: it was a large clay jar burned hard. It was heated by filling it with burning sticks and grass, then it was cleansed, and the bread put in. This was the common manner in Jerusalem for those who did not depend upon the public baker.

Asaph was now a tall graceful lad, very expert with his bow, which he made year by year larger and stronger. He would now permit his mother to go no more on her midnight excursions alone, but always accompanied her, gleaned as rapidly as she, and always bearing the burdens on his shoulders back to the cave.

All the news of the outside world—which to them was

Jerusalem—which ever came to them was the nightly cries from the walls and towers:

“All’s well!”

“All’s well. Ah, my son, that gladdens my heart. Dear Jerusalem is well; some day we will return, and then—”

“Yes, my mother, and worship Jehovah as of old,” Asaph would say with enthusiasm.

One morning, very early, when the cold of winter had made food scarce, and the denizens of the wilderness were fierce from hunger, Asaph was awakened by the pitiful cries of his flock of goats in the outer cave. He seized his bow and arrows and went directly to their assistance. A large fox had seized a kid, and it was struggling fearfully, while its dam was crying and trying to protect it.

Asaph took aim, and in a moment had pierced its heart. The flock had huddled together, and were trembling with fright. But Asaph had a kind word for all, and called each by its name; so when he had reassured them, he skinned the fox and then prepared the skin for a surprise for his loved mother.

Some time after, when it was ready, he brought it to her and said:

“See, my mother, here is a churn for thee.”

She had told him how, in Jerusalem, the women would take the skin of a kid tied at the feet and filling it with milk, would hang it on a pole, and, shaking it back and forth, the beautiful yellow butter would reward their labor.

So Helah had another household treasure, and felt still more happy in the possession of such a thoughtful son.

For some time there had been no noisy sacrifices in the grove; but Asaph had often seen the clouds of incense above the trees, so feared the cruel ceremony was still being performed, and he lived in constant dread of hearing the dying shrieks of the victims.

Both Helah and Asaph had become more venturesome as the years passed on, as no harm had befallen them, so they remained longer in the valley in the mornings, and Asaph delighted to explore the old tombs, and they wandered nearer to the walls of Jerusalem.

One morning, as they walked and conversed together of the future, suddenly the beatings of the "tophs" resounded in the valley, and the blasts from the silver trumpets on the walls of the king's garden shrilly cut the air.

Asaph trembled and turned pale.

"My mother, they are sending another child through the fires of Moloch! Will the great Jehovah, of whom thou toldest me, permit the sacrifice?"

"Alas, my son, I know not!"

"Is He so dreadful, my mother, that little children dare not cry to Him who is so able to save?"

"My son, I speak of Him with fear and trembling. We, who have worshiped Moloch, are impious in His sight."

"Thou didst not worship Moloch, my mother. In thy heart thou couldst not believe that hideous thing of wood and brass, decked with women's clothes, to be thy god. And I was too young to be accountable. But can not we save yon child, my mother?"

“How, my son? Should we interfere the high priest would have us torn to pieces.”

“Let *me* go, my mother, I will denounce the sacrifice; tell them they are breaking God’s holy law that Moses brought down from the mount.”

Helah looked at him almost in terror. Where had he learned these things?

“I will tell them Jehovah’s vengeance will overtake them for the innocent blood— Oh, let me go!” He almost escaped from her detaining hand.

“No, no, my son; if they will not listen to the Prophet Jeremiah they would laugh to scorn thy words.”

They had approached nearer to the grove unconsciously as they were talking—so near that the sudden shrieks of agony of the poor victim could be plainly heard above the noise of drums that vainly tried to drown them.

“My mother, I am sick with helpless indignation. Let us return to the welcome silence of the cave.” So they hastened back.

For a long while Asaph sat buried in thought, then he paced the cave back and forth, ever and anon uttering a sigh or groan. His mother did not interrupt his meditations even by a word, but took the distaff he had made her and began to spin the beautiful angora wool clipped from their flock to make it into winter clothing.

Helah had studied, when a maiden, with Huldah in the college at Jerusalem, so was enabled to teach Asaph and bring him to a higher standard of learning than was usual with boys of his age, and the rocky walls of their cave were covered with his lessons; but to-day he added nothing

to their number; he seemed to be wholly absorbed in some mental struggle.

“Yes, I will appeal to their fear,” he murmured. “It must be right. Yes, yes!” and still he paced the cave.

“What is it, my son, that troubles thee?”

“I was thinking of the awful sacrifices of the grove—”

“Banish it from thy thoughts, my son; the thinking will only make thy life one long day of pain. The evils we can not remedy were best forgotten.”

The reverence he bore his mother—a characteristic of the children of Israel—precluded his discussing what was so near his heart; but he determined he would make an individual effort to stop these inhuman sacrifices. So when he had arranged in his mind a plan of action, he sat down by his mother and said:

“Now let me help thee, my mother, and hear thy words of wisdom as we work.”

So he helped her with the spinning, she instructing him the while till time for dinner; then he kindled a fire while she kneaded cakes made from the grain they had gleaned together many a night by starlight. He ground the grain into flour between two stones—he would allow his mother to do none of the hard work now of their daily life, he felt so strong and proud of his advancing years.

“Rest, my mother,” he said, when the meal was ended, “and tell me about Jerusalem.”

He was never tired of listening to her descriptions of their old home and of the beautiful Temple, and the immense pools on which pleasure boats danced in the sun, of the lovely bazaars or fairs in which objects of beauty and

use from all over the world were offered for sale. Asaph had only a slight remembrance of the home of his birth. His life in the woods and caves had developed him into a boy of magnificent stature and strength and still more glorious beauty. The memory of the few years he had passed in Jerusalem were compressed into the experiences of that terrible day in the grove.

His mother would look at him at times with almost awe, especially when she told him of the old-time wanderings of their people, and he would denounce the wrongs of which they had been guilty in the impassioned tones of one inspired. She would think of his descent from "one of the sons of God" on his father's side, and wonder what would be his destiny in this great world. Thus they passed the day, for it would have been unsafe to have been seen in the valley in daylight, even to tend their flock of goats, on a day of sacrifice. So when she knew the gates of Jerusalem were closed they walked forth fearlessly hand in hand, and attended to their delayed duties, and housed their flock in the first great cave; then they went to the brook and purified themselves, then sat in the beautiful moonlight and discoursed till time for sleep.

His mother had taught him somewhat of the stars; but in these years of observation in which he delighted he had far outstripped her in the knowledge of their ways, and used to beg to sit each night a little while alone to meditate.

To-night he remained longer than usual, and on going to the cave found his mother asleep. He kissed her gently, but she awoke, so light is a mother's sleep, wishing to guard her loved ones, even in her dreams.

“ Ah, Asaph, good-night, darling.”

“ Peace be with thee, my mother,” he replied; and now she sunk into a deeper sleep, knowing her boy was there.

As soon as Asaph thought she would not notice his departure, he wrapped his mantle around him and went into the valley. He took his way by the Kedron, and when he came to the bridge he quickly crossed and soon came to the walls of the king's garden.

All was quiet in the grove. He was agile as a young athlete, so approaching a tall tree that threw its branches almost into the clustering vines that trailed over the wall and somewhat down its side in its luxuriance, he climbed quickly into its wide-spreading branches, then sprung into the vines and so drew himself to the top; from here he could see the windows of the palace, but all were dark save a faint light from one. For a moment he sat still, hid by the vines; then he cried in impassioned tones:

“ King Jehoiakim! King Jehoiakim! Woe, woe, woe to thee for the innocent blood! Didst thou not hear the babes cry in their agony? Oh. oh, o—h!”

This he wailed so pitifully that soon one window, then another, held a human face. He continued to cry:

“ Woe, woe, woe to Jerusalem for killing her babes! and woe to the king for breaking the laws of the mighty Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel! W-o-e! w-o-e!”

The sound was heart-rending, and soon King Jehoiakim came to his window with a terror-stricken face, and still Asaph continued to cry. Then the lovely face of a child appeared at the window where the light shone.

Asaph started; he had never seen anything so beautiful before. Was this the princess for whom he had been about to die? He arose and gazed at her. Just then the moon burst from behind a cloud and gleamed on his golden hair and radiant face. She saw him and started, but King Jehoiakim cried: "It is his spirit!" and fell back on to the floor of his chamber in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER VII.

KING JEHOIAKIM.

ALL was confusion in the palace; the physicians were hastily summoned, and for awhile it was feared Jehioakim was dead. Some of his servants could hardly conceal their joy, for he was a cruel master, and the least fault cost the offender his life, sometimes, too, by the most cruel torture.

The old officers and relatives of his deposed brother cried:

“Our despoiled king is avenged! Glory, glory to Moloch and Baal!”

But when Jehoiakim regained consciousness these shrunk away in sullen silence.

The Princess Elia and her mother had hastened to the king's couch, and bent over him, weeping, and Coniah, his son—a mild youth of some fifteen summers—uttered prayers to all the gods that were worshiped in Syria, and sometimes the name of Jehovah, his father's father, the good Josiah's God, fell from his lips.

When the king regained his speech his children prostrated themselves before him, touching their foreheads to the floor. When he saw them he smiled faintly, and said:

“Is—is it you, my children? What—what has befallen me?”

“Only a faintness, my lord and father,” replied his son, kissing his hand.

“Elia, my Rose of Sharon, didst thou not see—was it not a spirit?”

“No, my gracious lord; it was but a beauteous boy standing in the moonlight!”

“It—it was his spirit. The boy was being offered to great Moloch for—for thy prosperity, but he escaped with his mother to die in the wilderness.”

“Most gracious lord, I do not think that was aught but a living being we saw,” said Elia’s mother.

“Astarte be praised! He did not die that cruel death for me,” cried the princess.

The king groaned:

“Why does Moloch allow his spirit to return to vex me? But—but if he lives, Dumah shall seek him.”

“Oh, my gracious king and father, do him no harm! What advantage could his death avail—how add to my happiness? If I have thy love I need naught else.”

The king smiled and said:

“Thou hast that, my daughter, but woe to them of this house that hate me, and would league with others to destroy my peace of mind!”

Elia dared not venture further, but pressed her father’s hand, and seeing that he wished to sleep, she made obeisance to him and left the chamber.

In her own dainty room she sat and thought. The Ethiopian maid lay on a mat at her feet; she had not even been aroused by the running of many feet. These children of the torrid sun, though faithful like dogs, are heavy sleepers, and their watch is with their heart more than their eyes.

“If the boy lives, I must warn him. I would not that my father should be guilty a second time of his blood. I do not think the peaceful Astarte would wish it!”

Then she laid herself down to sleep with the goddess's name upon her lips.

Soon the palace was again sunk in slumber.

The morning dawned on Jerusalem, peaceful and beautiful, but the palace was full of ugly rumors of the night before.

“Eliakim is being punished for being the servant of Egypt—Egypt, whom Jehovah despised and chastened with plagues and death for our sakes!” cried an old white-headed Benjamite, who had never forsaken the true God. “Aha! Jehovah's will be done!”

This was immediately reported to the king, and in an hour the evil birds were feeding on his poor dismembered body, that had been dragged asunder, then thrown over the walls into the valley of Hinnon. Then the other inmates of the palace were more cautious, and the shakings of the heads and knowing looks only passed between friends.

* * * * *

The king, in gorgeous robes, sat on his throne in the judgment-hall, a curious temple, raised up on pillars in the midst of a great apartment of the palace buildings.* It had a frieze of beautifully sculptured stone, the plants and trees so closely copied from nature that the leaves seemed to stir with the wind.† The ceiling was beautifully painted

* Or else the House of the Forest of Lebanon.

† Josephus.

in colors. Here also was the magnificent ivory throne of Solomon, with the fourteen guarding lions, and the bullock against which he leaned, all bound together and resplendent with gold.

On each side of the throne, but lower down, were his armed body-guards, his officers, princes, and eunuchs.

Before him, prostrate on the floor, were those who came to plead for justice or mercy. Near them, in almost as abject attitudes, were his servants and petty officers.

The king was burning under a sense of injury, and to-day none found mercy at his hands; a look, a motion, and each was borne away to punishment.

Even this seemed to irritate him more, and he cried:

“Bear the wretches to their doom! I will hear no more!”

And the struggling, screaming people, men and women, were hastened away by spear-thrusts and borne to the mysterious subterranean chambers from which no one returned.

Then the king said:

“Bring Dumah, Moloch’s high priest, and all begone save my guard.”

For awhile he sat silent. Soon the high priest was brought between two officers, looking frightened, but as sinister as Jehoiakim himself.

“Why hast thou done this thing, oh, priest! to vex thy king and master?”

Dumah prostrated himself, but not as humbly as the others had done.

“I have done naught to vex my lord.”

“ Didst thou not find the boy that escaped great Moloch long years ago?”

For a moment Dumah hesitated, then his cheek flushed red.

“ Ay, most gracious king; he and his adulterous mother had fled to the tomb of the good Queen Jezebel, and thus was the slaughter of the priests and prophets of great Baal avenged, for the people—tore—them—limb—from—limb!”

In these days a falsehood was considered justifiable on the least pretext; even those considered to be the prophets of the most high God deceiving and lying without a blush of shame, they even besmutching, as much as man could do, the fame of the great God of Truth by charging Him with accomplishing His purposes by employing lying spirits, thus intimating that He was not all-powerful, but had to call to His aid disreputable spirits that lived in the heavenly kingdom.*

“ Then it was his spirit I saw. Canst thou not propitiate great Moloch with a splendid offering of many—an offering he shall not despise—so that he will leave me in peace?”

The priest's eyes glistened.

“ Ay, most mighty king; such an offering as shall shame to nothing aught that has gone to him before.”

“ Make thy preparations then. Send couriers through the cities and the villages that still belong to us, and bid the people hasten magnificently attired to the sacrifice.”

* II. Chronicles, xviii Chapter, 14 to 23 verses.

Just then hurried steps were heard, and an Israelite entered with an armed escort of the palace. He prostrated himself before the king. His clothes were torn and travel-stained; thus he lay, with his face touching the floor, without uttering a word.

“Arise! Speak! Wherefore this haste and these marks of travel from afar?” asked the king, haughtily.

“Oh, gracious, mighty king! Seven days ago, as thy servant was tending his flock upon the mountain-side toward the great Euphrates, a dust as of a whirlwind arose from the valley. When the sun rose high the cloud lifted, somewhat drawn by his power, and there, glittering in his rays, marched a myriad armed and warlike men, their faces set toward Jerusalem. Thy servant hastened day and night, faint for lack of food, to warn my gracious lord!”

As he ceased speaking, he fell to the floor, foaming at the mouth.

For a moment Jehoiakim was speechless with astonishment, then he said:

“Give yon wretch good care. Mark ye, do not let him die. I would learn more.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ASAPH MEETS THE PRINCESS.

DUMAH hastened into the valley of Hinnon. He had heard all the particulars, much exaggerated, of the night before, and felt convinced that Asaph still lived.

“This time he shall not escape Moloch, but he shall not pass to the great god’s arms. No: his beauteous limbs shall feed the fires of sacrifice!”

Then he gathered together those of the priests he felt were bound to his interests, and imparted to them the great secret, and dividing up the valley, gave each a portion to search minutely.

Little Elia, who was a great favorite in the palace, on account of her gentle disposition and her influence with the king, had learned everything.

“Oh, how should she warn the boy? The thought of harm befalling him on her account made her almost ill.

She wandered in the garden all day long, and gazed at the place where she had seen him stand so glorious in his beauty in the moonlight.

“I will not rest to-night, but watch at my window, so that should he come again, I will bid him hide and save himself.”

But she was so young that before the night was spent she fell asleep at her post, and the Ethiopian maid laid her upon her couch.

Asaph, expecting something might result from his weird visit, kept himself closely concealed all day, first obliterating all evidence of habitation by strewing leaves and brambles all around, then drawing the trailing vines over the opening to their cave. They were careful to make no fire for the smoke to betray them through the cleft in their rocky ceiling, and he listened intently to hear if any foot passed that way.

“What has happened, my son, that we must be more careful this day over any other?” Helah asked.

Asaph took her hand, and said imploringly:

“Trust me this once, my mother, without an explanation.”

Just then little showers of dust and rock fell down through the rift in the top of the cave.

“Ah! men or beasts are passing above. Listen!”

Soon they heard the steps of several, and caught the words:

“Armed men—toward Jerusalem.”

“Ah!” cried Helah; but Asaph laid his hand upon her arm, and whispered:

“’Sh!’” pointing to the opening.

When the crunching of their steps had died away, she cried:

“Oh! is beautiful Jerusalem, the city of my love, to be again besieged by her cruel enemies? So have the prophets cried again and again, but none would listen! Woe, woe is me!”

And she stooped and poured handfuls of dust upon her head, and moaned and wrung her hands in mental agony.

Asaph comforted her as best he could, but remembering so little of Jerusalem, he could not fully understand her sorrow. The armed force coming toward the city was the reason of her son's extra vigilance, she thought, and wondered at his wisdom.

When the gates of Jerusalem were closed they stole quietly out into the beautiful night. Nearing the walls, they noticed an extra number of watchmen were guarding them, and that the towers were full of light and the noise of busy men.

“We must lay up much stores, my mother; for when armed men fill this valley it were dangerous for thee to go abroad.”

So they gleaned till late. Asaph knew where the wild bees had their homes in many a hollow tree and rock, so he brought great combs and filled earthen jars for future use.

When his mother had sunk to sleep he quietly left the cave.

Soon he was in his place of the night before on the walls of the king's garden. Immediately he began his moaning and crying.

“Woe! woe! woe! for the innocent blood! Woe to Jehoiakim! Woe to the priest of Moloch!”

Again the window filled with faces, again the king looked forth in terror.

“Oh, ye people, ye shall be broken to pieces! Woe unto them that rob the widow of her children!”

The king trembled and shook with horror.

“Spare the babes, oh, king! Their blood crieth out against thee. Oh—h!”

Elia stood at her window and made a sign. Asaph arose to his full height in the moonlight, then in a moment he disappeared.

* * * * *

Asaph awoke early the next morning before the gates were opened, and wrote upon the wall this message:

“My mother, I beseech thee, stay in the cave to-day. Fear not for me. I go to learn the news. I will be prudent and return when it is not dangerous.”

Then he hastened to the king's garden, and hid himself among the vines upon the wall. Soon the beautiful little Elia came to the window; he arose full in her view; she looked terrified, and made a sign of danger, then pointed to the garden.

Quickly he climbed down the hanging vines, but they could not sustain his weight, but broke in his hands, so he jumped and fell, striking a small rock. He lay for a moment stunned and slightly bleeding.

Elia, who had watched at her window since day-break, hastened to his side.

“What! dead?” she cried, as he lay motionless; then she gently turned his head, and saw the terrible scar of the burn and the trickling blood.

“Moloch has conquered! he has died for me at last!” and she bent over him weeping. The tears falling on his face aroused him.

“I—I—am not hurt—only my jump was almost a fall,” he said, sitting up.

She took the corner of her robe and stanchèd the blood.

“Astarte be thanked! thou livest!” she cried, with joy. “But quick, let me hide thee: for any moment the slaves might come, and then— I shudder to think what might happen to thee.”

She led him into a beautiful little garden inclosed with a high hedge. The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers and fruit trees. Delicate palms gave refreshment and shade, and in the midst was a small building made in the Egyptian style, substantial but highly ornate. The interior was florid with their peculiar decorations of ibis, lilies, flamingoes, storks, and papyrus reeds, and the pictured Nile and pyramids.

“Here, gentle boy, is my bower. None dare enter without my word—not even my slave Cleo.”

Then she brought him wine and fruits and little cakes, and with cool water from the fountain by the door she bathed his face.

Asaph saw everything as in a dream.

“Thou art very beautiful,” he said at last; but Elia was too young to blush at admiration, so she said:

“Eat and drink; then we will talk.”

He took a little cake, and, breaking it, he smiled and gave her half.

She took it with a pleased obeisance.

“Art thou a prince?” she asked.

“I know not,” he replied, “but my name is Asaph.”

“Did they once try to give thee to Moloch for my sake?”

“Ay! I remember it as it were yesterday; but my mother fled and saved me.”

“Astarte be thanked! I like not Moloch; the children cry so pitifully going to his arms that it makes me weep. My father fears thou art a spirit; but thou art not—is it not so?”

“I am but a body of flesh and blood as thou art; but as my mother and myself walk in the valley the agonized crying of the babes makes us weep also, and so I tried, Jehovah helping, to stay the cruel sacrificing.”

“Who is Jehovah? Is he a mighty king? I heard my brother Coniah speak his name with Baal and Astarte.”

“I scarcely know. But my mother said that, years ago, when Jerusalem was much more glorious than it is this day, He was the God whom all Israel worshiped, but that He was so dreadful in His anger that now they pray to gods that can not punish them.”

“I fear my father means thee harm; so come no more with thy sad cries to the wall, lest he have a guard lying in wait for thee. I will plead for the poor babes, for my father loves me well. But Moloch’s high priest is very powerful and very cruel. Even now they are preparing for a great sacrifice to propitiate the gods and keep the mighty King of Babylon away from Jerusalem.”

“Oh, that I dare go through the city and warn the people!” cried Asaph.

“Wouldst thou like to see Jerusalem, and dost thou not dare?”

“Ay; but only for my mother’s sake, for if I were dead she would have none to console her.”

“Stay till to-night, and I will disguise thee in Cleo’s garments, and we will go together.”

There was a great deal of freedom permitted the wives and maidens of Jerusalem, and they went about and visited much with their faces covered or uncovered as it pleased them. Children also were permitted to play freely on the streets—indeed, the more children seen thus enjoying themselves the greater was considered the prosperity and happiness of the people.

Asaph’s heart leaped with joy at the thought of seeing Jerusalem and the holy Temple.

“Oh! princess, thanks!” and he made a deep obeisance; but she raised him quickly.

“I am Elia to thee. Cleo, my slave, is faithful—we will tell her.” Going to the door she gave a peculiar call, and the Ethiopian came to her smiling. “Cleo, this is a son of the gods; do not betray that he is here; he will help both me and thee.”

The black slave showed her teeth, and her eyes shone bright.

“Him beautiful! Him go to Moloch!” she said.

Quick as a flash the little princess struck her on the mouth; but she withdrew her hand with a look of pain—she had bruised it on the slave’s teeth.

“Wretch!” she cried, “how dare you? He is a god, I say! Are you not afraid of his anger?”

Cleo fell prostrate to the floor, and taking one of Elia’s feet, she placed it on her neck.

“Let Cleo no die!” she cried. She was of those

Ethiopians fat and sleek who cherish no thoughts of revenge, but, like a dog, loves the hand that chastises them.

“Arise! I hate thee not. But remember, let him be as myself to thee. Here, eat these cakes for peace between us.”

Cleo liked the good things of this world, and needed no second bidding. Soon Asaph said:

“Let me return now to my mother, lest she fear—”

“Nay, they are searching for thee. Cleo brought me word the valley is full of armed priests to secure thee for the wicked Dumah. Stay till the gates are closed and danger past. I must go to the palace now. Cleo will be thy guard till I come again.” Then looking at her, she said, “Remember, as myself, slave!” and hastened away.

Cleo prostrated herself at his feet. For awhile he gazed at her; she must be his friend; then he said:

“The princess has told thee true. I am descended from one of the sons of God—so my mother has often told me.”

“Ay, him hair is like the sun-god, and him eyes shine like Astarte’s. Cleo am him slave!” and she put his foot upon her neck.

“Enough. Do not betray my presence here to the king or to aught other living being here. Serve me, and good will come to thee. Dost like honey?”

“Ay, master,” she said, smacking her lips.

“And figs and pomegranates and sweet spices?”

“Ay, good master.”

“To-morrow will I bring thee what my hands can carry; but be faithful to me.”

“Cleo’s master unto death,” she replied.

Asaph looked about; the grandeur delighted him: the soft couches, the beautiful Persian rugs, the lovely work of the potter's art. He remembered nothing of all this in Jerusalem, or so very faintly it was like a dream one strives in vain to remember in one's waking moments.

The coloring of the walls was a little too vivid, and slightly jarred upon his sensitive perceptions; but it was all so new that this feeling was absorbed in the pleasure he felt.

When the princess returned he was resting on a couch, and Cleo was on her knees fanning him with a great bunch of peacocks' feathers.

"Master sleeps," she said.

Elia stood and gazed upon him.

"How beautiful! I did not think a human being could live under such a weight of loveliness. I see no hair like his among our people, and his skin is as rose leaves dipped in milk."

Asaph stirred under her earnest gaze, and opened his eyes. In a moment he was making his obeisance to her.

"Nay, forget not I am only Elia to thee, a poor little maiden to whom thou shalt teach thy wisdom. To-night we will see Jerusalem in her beauty, for there is to be a festival to the good Astarte, and I am to offer cakes. Wilt thou do so also—as a maiden?"

"Nay, I will only come as thy slave—not to worship, but to protect thee."

So it was arranged that when the sun went down he should stain his face, and in Cleo's clothes accompany the princess, leaving the slave concealed in the pavilion.

CHAPTER IX.

FESTIVAL TO ASTARTE.

ALL day long Elia went between the palace and pavilion, learning what she could of the proceedings of Dumah, and the latest intelligence brought by couriers to the king of the approach of the enemy to Jerusalem.

At length the day passed, and the beautiful sunset, that never failed to delight the beholder, faded to a tender gray; then the moon arose at her full and seemed to turn the night into day again.

Two figures emerged unchallenged from the palace gates; the guards all recognized the princess and her maid; they never suspected that the boy whom all were seeking passed before their eyes under the disguise of a female slave. Elia laughed.

“Is it not pleasant to thee when even the king’s armed men lower their spears at thy approach?”

“Nay, not at mine, but thine, oh, princess!”

“It is the same from this time on: thou art my brother.”

So they passed on into the streets. Asaph was speechless with wonder at all he saw. The people were dressed in their best garments; the maidens in pure white, with beautiful wreaths of flowers upon their heads.

At the top of every street were little brazen altars, beautifully sculptured and of graceful shape; at each a

group of the most beautiful maidens of Jerusalem and the country round about constantly offered the cakes to Astarte. Their brothers had gathered the wood, their fathers built the fires, and their mothers made the cakes, so that all took part in this gentle worship. But Jeremiah had denounced it again and again as displeasing to the Lord; for as Astarte was the goddess of fertility, sometimes very impure ceremonies were observed in her honor.

Asaph looked on, but would take no part in the proceedings, not even offering to hold the princess's dainty little basket containing the cakes, but he held her mantle as her slave would do.

The moon rose higher and higher, and the altars on every house-top and in every street sent up clouds of incense; the music sounded louder and louder, and the burning cakes, mixed with sweet spices, sent up a grateful perfume, and the fires flashed brightly as, ever and anon, the youths poured their drink offerings of wine to be lapped up by the flames.

The maidens danced and sung, and the youths gathered round them and played upon their pipes, and the scene was very pretty save to those who feared Jehovah's wrath.

But as they eat of the cakes and drank of the wine the scene became wilder, the dancing more fantastic, the music more seductive, and the youths more demonstrative.

How lovely Elia appeared! and how gracefully she danced; but Asaph's face was clouded, and as she neared him in her enthusiasm he whispered:

“Come, oh, princess!”

In a moment she was by his side.

“Does it not please thee, Asaph?” she murmured.

“No, I like it not,” he replied. “Let us return to the palace.”

“Shall we go by the Temple, my brother?”

“Ay!” and Asaph’s face lighted up with joy.

It was a long walk, but the sight of the beautiful portico that skirted the height of the Tyropean Valley and with triple rows of immense marble pillars led to the Temple was reward enough for any labor.

“How beautiful! how beautiful!” Asaph murmured; and when they came in sight of the Temple he bowed his head in awe.

Jeremiah was on the steps that led down to the ascent to the city of David, and from this elevated position he hurled denunciations against the idolaters.

“Woe unto them that burn incense on the house-top to other gods! Woe, woe unto them that worship the hosts of heaven! I will break them as a potter’s vessel. I will send them as strangers into a land they know not of. Judah shall be captive, and the daughter of Zion shall be a hissing and a shame!”

Asaph stopped and listened in wonder.

“Praise Jehovah! Jehovah’s name be praised!” Then as the prophet caught sight of Elia’s white robe and wreath he cried: “And thou too, oh, maiden! hast defiled thyself in worshiping Astarte. Woe, woe to the idolaters!” and seizing her robe he tore it in twain.

Asaph’s blood rushed faster to his heart, and his eyes blazed in anger.

“Not so rough, good priest!” he cried, and raised his

hand and struck him in his rage. "This is but a young maiden, and used to gentler treatment."

"Ay, ay, and who art thou, with a boy's voice and strength, in the garments of a slave girl, that dare to strike the prophet of the Lord?"

"Jeremiah!—I crave thy pardon. Yes, I am a boy, too tender in years, and absence from Jerusalem, to know the prophet of my people."

"Ay, a boy!" and Jeremiah, struck with his submissive gentleness, pressed the mantle from off his head, and seeing his golden hair, cried:

"Ah! the long-lost offering to Moloch!"

"Thou sayest truly; but I hate that cruel image of brass and stone! I would worship Israel's true God, the great Jehovah, if thou wilt teach thy poor servant."

"So thou didst escape him? Joy! joy! And who is the damsel?"

"Jehoiakim's daughter, for whom I was to have been sacrificed. She despises Moloch, too, and together we will learn of thee."

"Good Jeremiah, can we not come in the day-time on these steps and listen to thee?" asked Elia.

"Ay, and praise to the Lord that the lambs are coming back to His fold!"

Then they made obeisance to him and returned to the palace. From thence Asaph went to his mother in the cave.

CHAPTER X.

TRAGIC DEATH OF THE HIGH PRIEST OF MOLOCH.

RUMORS of war filled the very air of Jerusalem. King Necho, of Egypt, had been vanquished at Charchemish by Nebuchadnezzar, who thereupon overran all Syria with his army, excepting Judea.

Necho was Jehoiakim's friend, for he had made him king, instead of his brother, and although he paid him yearly tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one of gold, yet he relied on him for protection against the more powerful surrounding kings.

The glory had departed from Israel. In Solomon's magnificent reign hundreds of petty kings had yearly brought tribute to his hand, and more powerful rulers sent or brought him splendid presents of friendship; but now Jehoiakim had no friend to depend on for help but Necho, and he had retired into his own kingdom with a diminished army.

The news of the approach of Nebuchadnezzar spread consternation through Jerusalem. The people, weakened by luxurious living and dissipation, had become effeminate, and the war spirit had nearly died out of them. They no more sallied forth from their many gates with flying banners and shrill trumpet-calls to the attack. Fear took the place of martial ardor, and they tried to propitiate their many gods. Jeremiah constantly thundered in their ears:

“Go not after strange gods, to serve them and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the work of your hands! Saith the Lord: ‘Depend not on Egypt; she is a broken reed to them that lean upon her.’ Their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. ‘Woe unto the pastors that scatter the sheep of my pasture!’ saith the Lord.”

But it was all in vain, for it had been some four years since there had been any regular service in the Temple, and that was only half-hearted and through fear, for at that time the King of Babylon was at war with Egypt, and they wished to propitiate all the gods for the sake of their ally, as well as for themselves, so, as Jeremiah had thundered in their ears so often, they had at last a day of fasting and prayer to Jehovah in the Temple; but at the same time they worshiped Baal, Moloch, Asteroth, or Astarte, and all the hosts of heaven. Still there were many who had never forsaken the worship of the true God, and these suffered and wept, and prayed in secret, for Jehoiakim was a cruel man, easily offended, with only one tender spot in his heart—love for his own children.

Jeremiah remembered how near he was to being stoned to death in the first year of Jehoiakim’s reign, even by the accusations of the priests and prophets, and that only the kind words of the princes saved him.

Urijah, who also prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem for its wickedness, had been taken from Egypt, whence he had fled, and had been killed by the sword of Jehoiakim himself.

Still, Jeremiah was not afraid, but prophesied again and

again as the words came to him from the Lord. He had been imprisoned and put in stocks, but still he did not hesitate to thunder forth the Lord's denunciations against the sins of the king and people.

* * * * * *

But now the day had arrived for the great sacrifice to Moloch. All former magnificence of paraphernalia, length of procession and number of offerings were to be surpassed by this last act of cruel grandeur in King Jehoiakim's reign. Those who did not participate through choice did so through fear, for the mighty enemy was almost at their gates, and this was the last supreme effort to gain the intercession of the gods.

Dumah had scoured the city and the adjacent villages for the most beautiful children that could be found, and many mothers were wailing, rending their garments, and throwing dust and ashes on their heads.

But Dumah's heart was of iron, as inaccessible to pity as was that of the horrid thing of brass which he so assiduously served.

From early morning Asaph had been in the pavilion with the princess. He was restless and unhappy, walking the floor and wringing his hands, and calling on Jehovah to prevent the wicked slaughter.

"Dear brother, I too hate the hideous Moloch, who caused that cruel scar upon thy cheek. No god that was good could have it in his heart thus to mar thy glorious beauty!"

"Oh, princess, what can we do—how stop the inhuman sacrifice? It is for wickedness like this that the Most

High, the God of gods, is about to punish Jerusalem, for He hath said He will utterly destroy the idols; 'for Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah has fallen, because their tongues and their doings are against the Lord!' "

"I was pleading with the king, my father, when Dumah came. He held me silent and spell-bound with his cruel eye; my tongue refused to speak another word."

"We are but children. Oh, for the wisdom of age to plead for the poor little babes!"

Just then the music sounded.

"Let us hasten and snatch them from the cruel fires, as my mother did!" cried Asaph, excitedly.

"There are forty of them, my brother," replied Elia.

Asaph buried his face in his hands and wept. The music came nearer and nearer.

"Come, let us go upon the walls. I know a place where the foliage is so thick that we can see without being observed by any."

"Oh, the horror of it! I could not; yet—yet—"

He seemed to be drawn irresistibly. The princess clasped his hand, and together they drew nearer to the wall.

"That is the spot; let us quickly mount the steps used by the priests, who sound the trumpets. 'Tis not quite time for them to come, but wait a moment behind this bush."

And she sped away as swiftly as a young deer. In a few minutes she returned with a large mantle. Throwing it over Asaph, she drew him after her.

Soon they had mounted to the top of the wall, and the valley and grove were plainly seen; then they hid behind a

net-work of vines, and, slightly parting them, they could see in safety.

Louder and louder sounded the music, and nearer came the procession. As the king's garden projected so far into the valley, they could plainly see the imposing pageant as it issued from the Fountain Gate, glittering and dazzling in the sun.

"It comes to me like the realization of a beautiful dream. How happy I was! I felt as if I had the wings of a bird, and was lifted high above the earth; but, oh, the horror of the ending! the hideous Moloch! Oh, so horrible, none can tell who have not seen him! I shrunk from him in disgust and loathing; and then his cruel fires made—this!" and he pointed to his cheek.

Elia gently touched his scar with her pure lips.

"I hate the wicked Moloch, too, and will pray to the gentle Astarte, the queen of heaven, to quench his fires that did the cruel deed."

"One—two—three—forty chariots of the sun and forty innocent children! See, princess, their looks are exalted; they fancy yon cruel beast a god! Oh, pity, pity thy lambs! Oh, great Jehovah, pity!" and the tears ran down his cheeks; he felt as though he was going to his own death.

Suddenly the trumpets sounded so near that he could have touched the robes of the priests with his outstretched hand.

The gorgeous curtains of the grove were drawn aside, and there stood the immense braziers of fire, fiercer and more cruel than ever, for they had more work to do.

All the ceremonies were progressing simultaneously. The first victims passed quickly through the fires, the topes beat loudly, and the curtains closed and shut out the sight; but the cries of agony could not be stilled by drums or trumpets.

Asaph turned deathly pale, clinched his hands, and would have thrown himself over the wall in his excitement and rushed upon the murderous priest, but Elia whispered:

“It would be only one more victim to the hideous Moloch. Live to be a man, then let them feel your power.”

Again and again the fearful cries of agony! Asaph felt sick and weak and almost dead.

Again the curtains were drawn aside.

“More fuel for great Moloch!” cried Dumah. “More, more! Let it reach up to heaven! Ah! those cries are music to His ears; He will protect Jerusalem. More fuel! More, more!”

The flames hissed and roared, and sent whirling sparks up into the air—the trees were covered with them.

Again the priest led a victim forward. The child hesitated. Dumah pushed him with his hand, but suddenly a cracking sound was heard. The priest was so intent in his murderous work that he did not notice it. Then an immense branch of a neighboring tree, burned partly through by the fierce fire, could no longer sustain its own weight, but fell with a mighty crash, and striking one of the tall braziers, threw it, hissing and blazing, on the high priest’s body. For a moment there was a hush of horror.

Then the shrieks of agony and yells and imprecations of Dumah were fearful to the ear.

His face was drawn into fearful contortions as he threw his head from side to side in agony. His limbs, stretched out, were beating the air, and curled like snakes in excruciating pain. His struggles grew less and less; one last cry of agony rent the air, and the fierce flames, made fiercer by his flesh, lapped him up, and in a little while only a heap of ashes remained of what had been but now the cruel high priest of Moloch.

Fear seized the multitude. Asaph sprung to his feet.

“Jehovah is avenged for the blood of the innocents!” he cried.

The priest upon the wall sprung back in fright, lost his footing, and fell down on the sharp rocks, crushed and dying in the valley of Hinnon.

The multitude fled in every direction, rending their garments and casting away all that impeded them in their flight. The gates of Jerusalem were closed, and horror froze the city into silence.

CHAPTER XI.

HELAH AND ASAPH, IN DISGUISE, SELL FISH IN JERUSALEM.

WHEN Asaph informed his mother of the tragic fate of the high priest, she bowed her head, and said:

“I sorrow for the pain the dreadful sight must have caused thy tender heart.”

“Yes, my mother, though he sought my life, my heart nearly ceased to beat at sight of his intense sufferings, and cold drops of sweat stood upon my brow, and I prayed Jehovah to have pity even on him, and end his agony. Then it seemed as if the great God had allowed Dumah’s ferocious wickedness to be its own avenger, and thus save the lives of most of those poor innocents.”

“Moloch has claimed his own at last, and we are free, my son—free to return to Jerusalem!” cried Helah, with enraptured gaze toward the city of her love.

“To live there and go in and out of its gates, free and unmolested?” asked Asaph, eagerly.

“Yes, my son. We have a beautiful house there, with gardens on the roof and a little altar to Astarte.”

Then, seeing the smile leave his face, she added:

“We will not offer incense to the gentle goddess, if thou disapproveth.”

“Not I, but the great Jehovah, my mother.”

“We have all the comforts that pertain to a rich man’s

house, my son. I wonder which of my kin are living there, to keep it safe for the widowed sister?"

"When shall we go, my mother? Then can I worship in the Temple, and listen to Jeremiah. Let us hasten!"

"Not too hastily, my son; we must consider for awhile. King Jehoiakim still lives. It is best to test our safety first, before risking all. We will leave the cave just as it is, so the flocks can find shelter at night, and— We have been long absent, who knows what may have happened during all these years?"

"Thou reasoneth well, my mother. What shall our disguise be?"

Helah sunk her head in her hands, and remained buried in thought for some time. At last she said:

"We will enter Jerusalem at the Fish Gate, near which is a market. There, with our basket of fish, we can hear the gossip of the street, and by a question here and there see our way before us. Go, my son, and gather many stout, thin reeds of papyrus, and we will weave them into baskets and into nets to catch the fish of Kedron."

Asaph kissed her on the forehead, he was so happy, and went quickly about the work.

Helah brought from their concealment her scarlet and purple petticoats that she had saved, knowing that when they returned to Jerusalem, which she had ever in her mind, that they must do so in civilized dress, not in the hairy robes of barbarians.

Of the purple one she made a tunic and turban for Asaph, and the remnant of the large black veil she gathered into a mantle. For herself she put the red skirt over

her ordinary dress, and turned a curious woven strip, which she had made of feathers, into a bright head-dress, and her own mantle completed the costume. They both had sandals of the skins of beasts of prey that Asaph had shot from time to time.

Soon Asaph returned with a large armful of reeds, and they both set to work to weave baskets. This was not their first experiment in reed-work; many articles around the cave attested their skill.

“To-night we will catch fish for our baskets, and to-morrow morning—oh, joy!—I shall be in loved Jerusalem!”

When the baskets and nets were completed it was almost dark, so Asaph hastened to that part of the brook where he had caught fish before; but he was tender-hearted and was slow to take the life of the meanest thing, and then only for necessity. But now he must do so, and do his best to have the fish large and fine. He set the nets, and then returned to the cave.

“Now let us go to the garden,” said Helah, “and may this be the last time that we must wait for night to cover us.”

They proceeded almost in silence, save a word now and then; both were occupied with their own thoughts.

Asaph’s heart beat faster as he approached nearer to Jerusalem.

He looked at those high walls and magnificent buildings showing above them with renewed interest, and the cry of the watchmen, as they paced slowly to and fro, of “All’s well!” sounded like sweetest music to his ears.

When they reached the garden, Asaph began to pluck the fruits.

“Only enough for the day, my son, and some bright green leaves to cover the fish. I came for other things—saffron and aloes—but I know not if they are here.”

Saffron and aloes! He had never heard the words before. He wondered what they were. Respect for parents made the Israelitish children not too free with questions.

“Ah, here is saffron—I know it by its leaf; and here is lignaloos, both good for medicine and other uses, as you shall see.”

When they had gathered what they desired, they slowly returned, watching the lights in the towers till they disappeared in the distance or were hid by the intervening foliage.

They went to rest early, wishing to enter Jerusalem when first the gates were opened in the morning.

Their sleep was always sweet after the labors of the day; then, too, the silence of the cave, shut off from all the noises of the outside world, allowed them to rest undisturbed; so each morning they arose refreshed and strong for what the day might bring forth.

They arose early and happy. Their movements were quicker, their eyes brighter than usual, for were they not to return to Jerusalem? The very thought made the blood flow faster through their veins.

“Here, my son, are thy garments; and here is saffron to stain thy fair skin, that thou shalt resemble one of those for whom thou art to pass; this turban, with the ends falling thus, will conceal thy scar; but go now and see what

fish the nets doth hold, and lay them in our baskets while I prepare our meat.”

When he returned the meal was ready; so showing the baskets to his mother, he said:

“Surely these will sell in the market-place. See how large and fine they are, and how like pearls the dainty colors of their scales.”

Then they sat and eat.

“For the last time in this cave, I hope,” said Helah.

“Yet, mother, I have been very happy here. I shall miss the milking of our goats, and the pretty frolic of the gentle little kids, and—oh, my birds!”

“Shall we take some with us?”

“No, my mother, I would not have them dash their pretty heads against the bars and pine and die for liberty. It were a selfish love that placed not the happiness of the loved beyond its own.”

“Let us haste—the day grows light. Put on these garments—now the saffron. I would scarcely recognize thee, my son; draw the mantle over all.”

In a short time she also was ready, but her face was stained darker than his, as would be natural of one of maturer years.

Taking their baskets of fish, they left the cave. At the entrance the goats were waiting for them; but he only stroked their soft hair, and murmured low:

“Jehovah protect you from the beasts of the forest.”

Then they hastened away.

It was quite a distance to the Fish Gate; they had to pass the king's garden, the beautiful pool of Siloam, the Sheep

Gate, then up the valley of Jehosaphat, passing the citadel, till at last it was reached, after skirting nearly two sides of Jerusalem.

The Fish Gate was a very important and prominent gate, but not so large and splendid as many others. As soon as they entered they noticed the vacant place was crowded with wailing people.

“Ah, lord! Ah, poor priest!” they cried and rent their garments and tore their hair.

Asaph, noticing the blood trickling down their arms, asked in a whisper the reason. His mother replied:

“They are mourning for Moloch’s high priest.”

Then he noticed them cutting their arms and legs with little knives; this they did, not out of love for Dumah, but out of fear; and so he was mourned all over the city.

They stopped in the market and putting down their baskets, they uncovered the fish. The other venders stared at them some time in silence. They were strangers and excited their curiosity by their beautiful and dignified bearing; but soon they began to ply them with all sorts of questions. Helah said but little, but Asaph replied to their questions by asking others, and soon they learned that Jerusalem was full of people from the adjacent villages and those who still dwelt in tents, they having fled before the approach of Nebuchadnezzar’s great army; also that Jehoiakim was not preparing the people to fight against him.

“Egypt will help us,” cried an old market-woman, who sold citrons, leeks, and garlies, “for do we not pay tribute?”

“And our walls are strong,” cried an aged Kenizite. Then in a whisper: “And Jehovah has not wholly deserted His people.”

Asaph looked at him and bowed his head; that pleased the old man, and he smiled and said:

“Whence comest thou, pretty boy?”

“From the wilderness,” Asaph replied.

“And has fear struck all them that dwell in tents? So thou camest to Jerusalem—good, good, she will protect her children.”

Near them, resting against a pillar, stood a black-eyed girl with marked Jewish features. She was poorly clad, with here and there little attempts at coquetry—a brass ornament, a ribbon, or a plaited armlet of reeds dyed red. At her feet was a basket of beautiful flowers. She had been looking at Asaph with undisguised admiration, and listening to his every word. At length she said:

“Will it please thee to tell us thy name?”

Asaph looked at her in amazement.

“Nay; it can not profit thee to know; we are but wayfarers in Jerusalem.”

Just then two familiar figures passed—a little maiden with her face covered, and the slave girl Cleo. Asaph started.

“Why dost thou start, pretty boy, at sight of an Ethiopian? Hast never seen one before?”

Asaph answered not, but gazed after them.

Meanwhile Helah had sold nearly all her basket of fish. The poor were glad to buy them so cheap and of such a dignified woman; so she took some of Asaph.

“ Ah, my mother, I did not think; I do not understand the money or what to ask.”

Helah smiled and whispered:

“ We do not need the money; it is only to see and hear that we came; sell them to the poor for a penny each.”

“ Nay, that is not enough,” said the flower-girl, hearing the last few words. “ I will give thee more. My father is a Levite; and as but few offerings are brought to the Temple now, we have to buy our meat.”

“ Does he worship the great Jehovah?” cried Asaph. “ Does he serve in the Temple? Take all!”

His mother touched his arm.

“ Ah, here are two fine fish; give them to thy father as an offering to the Lord.”

“ Thou art very kind; and my father will thank thee, for the service of Baal and Astoroth does not give us the good things the Temple service did.”

“ Art thou idolaters now?” asked Asaph, in horror.

Again Helah touched his arm.

“ We do not call ourselves so, but we worship the gods who have helped our enemies, hoping by so doing that they will help us too.”

Asaph's brow clouded.

“ Nay, look not so sad, and Haggith will give thee a bunch of sweet violets.”

But he put her hand away without a word.

The princess and Cleo returned and stopped before the flower-girl and bought a bunch of violets; then Elia, raising her eyes, uttered a cry of joy, but Asaph gave her a warning look, and Cleo grinned and showed her teeth.

“Aha!” thought Haggith, “what mystery is this? And who is the girl, with her grinning slave?”

“Wilt buy a fish, young maiden?” said Asaph, giving her another warning look. “They are fresh this morning from the Kedron; and how they shine! they are fit for a king’s table.”

“Ay, boy, they are. Cleo, take them all, and pay him well.”

The slave emptied the fish into her basket and handed him a golden coin. Asaph had never seen one before, to remember, and stood looking at it.

“Give her the change,” whispered Haggith.

Asaph gave her the few pennies he had taken, and Haggith laughed out loudly:

“Thy fish have suddenly raised in value, my pretty boy.”

Elia looked at her and frowned.

“Thou needst not laugh. The whole coin is his. Take back thy pennies. Cleo, let us go,” and with a sign to Asaph they passed on.

“Thou hast a good friend and a rich one too in yonder proud little maiden,” said Haggith, a little hurt.

Now all the fish were sold, and Helah, taking Asaph’s hand, said:

“Come, my son,” and they left the market-place.

After they had traversed several streets, looking about as strangers would, they entered one of the handsomest, and Helah said:

“Ah, there is my house, just beyond that cluster of sycamore-trees: it is beautiful with marble pillars, and a

fountain in the court, with many chambers and servants and bond-maids. Now we shall see it! Oh, joy, my son!”

They had passed the trees, and she was pointing.

“ Ah! There it is!”

But a scene of devastation greeted them. For a moment Helah stood bewildered, then she said:

“ Can I have made a mistake? So many years have passed my memory may have failed me. No, there is the house of the rich Shapan, and there Henedad doth reside, and here my neighbor Ezera; and my house, my beautiful home, is utterly destroyed from off the face of the earth. Not one stone left upon another! Oh, my son! my son! Woe is me! Woe is me!” and she wrung her hands and cast dust upon her head.

The passers-by stopped to inquire her sorrow, and Asaph said:

“ Control thyself, my mother, and let us pass on; the people wonder.”

Helah suppressed the exhibition of her grief as much as possible.

They hastened to their nearest kinsman; but the same scene of desolation greeted them; then on to the next; the house was vacant and despoiled—so it was with all her kin. She knew of no one to whom to go and tell her secret and her grief.

“ Let us go back to our friendly cave, my mother, and there remain at night, returning each morning to the market-place; thus shall we learn all that happens, and in Jehvoah’s own good time He will bring us to our own inheritance.”

Helah was faint, and caught his arm.

“My mother, thou must have food. Come, let us return to the market.”

He led her along unresistingly, a sob ever and anon breaking from her closed lips. At last they sat in a little booth in the market, and Asaph bade them bring a piece of roast kid.

“For this once, my mother, for thou art weak with grief; but thou must keep thy strength for glorious things to come all in good time; now some wheaten cakes and bunches of ripe grapes. I will eat with thee, my mother.”

When they had thus refreshed themselves, they walked about and bought many little things that were new and strange to Asaph but had been common even to the bondwomen of Helah those years ago.

The sun was setting, so they hastened to the Fountain Gate and passed out into the valley of Hinnon, and soon were in the security of their friendly cave.

CHAPTER XII.

HAGGITH THE FLOWER-GIRL.

WHEN the market closed, Haggith had most of her wares unsold. This was because it was a day of mourning for Dumah, and there was no festival to any of the gentler gods or goddesses, so she delayed to return to her home for fear of her father's anger.

"Ah, but these fine fish will please him. I can not make the people buy my flowers if they want them not. Oh, why is he so stern!"

So thinking, she wended her way to the furthest gate—for she lived in the high fertile plain north of Jerusalem. Her father, Zaccur the Levite, was awaiting her at the door of their house; and when he saw her basket so full (for she had placed the fish beneath the flowers) he grasped her by the arm and cried:

"Indolent wretch, ungrateful daughter, why dost thou return with these unsold?"

Haggith winced with pain.

"Nay, my father, wait a moment," and she uncovered the fish. "See what a stranger sent thee as an offering to Jehovah!"

He counted the money she gave him.

"One—two—three. Only ten pennies and a farthing! Glutton, thou hast bought the fish for thy dainty appetite!"

Thou stolest the money, and to cover thy theft thou dost tell me the light story of the stranger's gift."

"No, no, my father, it is true, I swear by Astarte's altar!"

The Levite smiled grimly.

"That is a slight oath to one who has worshiped Jehovah."

"Yet it is true—he was but a boy younger than myself, but oh, so beautiful! and his mother had the dignity of a queen; they were selling fish in the market near the gate."

The Levite laughed loudly.

"Selling fish with queenly dignity, eh? Come, come, weigh thy words!"

"They were strangers; so I spoke kindly to the boy. Was it not meet that I should do so, my father?"

"But the fish, the fish?" he asked, impatiently.

"I heard the mother say to sell them to the poor for a penny each, so I offered to take them all—for I could sell them again; but when I said thou wert a Levite his face lighted up and he was about to give me all he had, when his mother touched him; then he sent thee the two finest as a present. Soon a little maiden with an Ethiopian slave came by and bought what remained and gave the boy a gold piece. They exchanged glances, and—"

"Aha! spies! I'll to the king; he will give me a reward; and—"

Haggith turned pale.

"Oh, my father! should it not be true, thou wouldst have innocent blood on thy hands; do not betray them yet; wait, wait till they come again, and I will watch."

“Ay, learn what thou canst. I should get gold, gold, the beautiful yellow gold!” and he rubbed his hands.

“Come, let me cook the fish, for I know that thou art ahungered.”

Their house was small and poor; a low table and a few stools of common wood, a hearth with a wide chimney, and a few pots and pans, a shelf on which were cups and plates and other household necessities completed the furnishing of the living-room. From this was a wide passage, on either side of which were sleeping chambers; the garden was beyond, the sweet odors of which were wafted through the house, and the roses nodded in at the little narrow windows.

“What a waste!” cried Zaccur, sniffing the air. “Oh, that I could gather this rare sweet perfume and confine it in a bottle, the nobles would give me money for it; now it delights my neighbors, and they give me nothing, nothing!” and he wrung his hands.

Soon Haggith said: “Come, my father, the fish is ready, and here is bread and wine.”

Zaccur sat at the table, and she stood by and served him. He smacked his lips and said:

“Haggith, thou needst not fright the boy; the fish is good—perchance he may send me more.”

“I doubt not that he will if he comes again; they are mourning for Dumah in the city. Father, the marketplace is spattered with blood and tufts of hair lay on the stones; that is the reason that I could not sell the flowers.”

“I liked him not; he was a proud, hard man, and

heaped gold to himself while we Levites nearly starved. And Moloch did not save him? 'Too bad, too bad!'" and Zaccur rubbed his hands and smiled.

* * * * *

King Jehoiakim had witnessed the terrible death of Moloch's high priest, and was borne away from the grove in his chariot, nearly unconscious with fright and horror. When he was placed upon his couch little Elia knelt by his side and said:

"Oh, my father and my lord, go not again to the wicked Moloch; it makes thy daughter sad to see thee suffer."

His only answer was a groan. As the day advanced he drank copiously of wine, so at length the horror subsided, and he became himself again.

Elin wondered what had become of Asaph, and sent Cleo several times into the garden to see, but he did not come, neither did his fearful cries sound from the walls that night to disturb the king.

The next day dawned, but still no Asaph came.

"What can be the matter? Cleo, didst thou hear of any person being injured in the grove yesterday?" Elia asked her slave.

Cleo thought.

"Big man burn with fire; move so," and the slave imitated Dumah's dying contortions of agony.

Elia shuddered.

"Not him; the boy with the golden hair—didst see him when all was over?"

For Asaph had escaped down the walls and mingled with the fleeing multitude.

Cleo slowly shook her head and said: "Him a god; he no be hurt."

The next morning Elia went with her slave to the market, thinking she might learn something of Asaph, and there she had seen him disguised as a fisher-boy. What did it mean?

When night came she watched at her window till late; but no Asaph appeared, so sighing, she went to her couch.

* * * * *

In the cave outside Jerusalem Helah was mourning.

"Oh! my beautiful home! and my friends, where are they? Gone! gone! What is left me but to die?"

"I am still with thee, my mother, and love thee much."

"Oh! my son, thou art more than all the rest; but I thought to have thy life so happy in Jerusalem; and now—"

"Grieve not, my mother, Jehovah will take care of us—I trust in Him."

Then he went out and set his nets and prepared for the morrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARKET-PLACE.

THE market-place was crowded, for there one could learn all the news and all the gossip.

Asaph and Helah were there with their fish and Haggith with her flowers. As soon as she saw him she said:

“My father sends thee thanks for thy kind present; he enjoyed them much.”

Asaph replied: “I am glad.” Then turned to some customers who pressed around him.

“I hear thy fish are cheap. Give me some of the best,” said a woman wearing a good garment.

Asaph raised his eyes.

“To the poor they are but a penny each.”

“Oh, thou hast two prices!”

“The poor need all pity; let them bide for them.”

“Oh, thou art young to be a teacher,” she said, scornfully, and passed on.

He looked after her, wondering, and thought, “Do not all pity the poor and help them as Jehovah has put it in their power?”

An old lame man with his staff in his hand stopped before him, but said nothing.

“Wilt have a fish, my father?” said Asaph, putting a fish in his basket.

“Thanks, good boy.” Then raising his eyes and

hands: "And praise be Jehovah, who hast put it in thy heart to be good to the poor!"

"Dost worship Jehovah?" asked Asaph, his eyes sparkling. "Come to-morrow and I will bring thee milk and honey."

"I have found a friend. Jehovah's name be praised!" said the old man; and making obeisance as to a king went his way.

Haggith tried all her little arts to attract Asaph's attention. She smiled, she coughed, she put a bunch of violets on her breast, but Asaph, when no customers were near, only talked with his mother.

Soon Elia and her slave appeared.

"Boy, hast good fish to-day?"

"Ay, maiden," Asaph replied.

"My slave will return—we go further," said Elia, with a warning look; then seeing Haggith watching, she gave her a look of scorn and passed on.

Cleo grinned and followed.

"Dost know the little maid, my son?" asked Helah.

"Ay; but speak not here," said Asaph, in a whisper.

Haggith bit her lip in vexation.

"I'll find out this mystery," she muttered. "I thought thou wouldst sell but to the poor—yon maid is rich."

"Dost thou know her?" Asaph asked.

"No; but me thinkest thou dost," Haggith replied.

"I am but a stranger in Jerusalem," he said, turning away, for he did not wish to betray his secret.

Haggith laughed quietly.

Soon Cleo returned and beckoned him.

“Come,” she said. “Let her no hear,” nodding her head toward Haggith. “She cunning fox.”

They took a step aside, and Cleo said:

“Princess wants god man to come to garden—tell him something. Come before Astarte rise,” and she was gone.

“The slave forgot the fish,” said Haggith, when he stood again by his basket. “I will buy them of thee.”

“Nay, I want not thy silver; take them to the Levite thy father, and bid him ask a blessing from Jehovah for my mother.”

Haggith’s eyes sparkled, and she carefully wrapped the fish in the green leaves and placed them under her basket.

“I thank thee for my father,” she said, softly.

“Let us go now, my mother. I have much to tell thee.”

Just then a company of men of war rode through the market-place, coming from the Joppa Gate. They were travel-stained and dusty. The people ran shrieking at their approach and cried:

“The Babylonians! the Babylonians!”

“Where shall we go, my son? Oh, Jerusalem! who shall protect thee?” cried Helah.

“Jehovah, my mother. Yon men of war are our brothers. See, they have not marred the corners of their beards nor shaved the hair from off their foreheads. They bring news to the king. Let us go.”

The market-place was quickly deserted, each hurrying home to bar his door in fear.

“ Let us go to the Temple, my mother. I would worship there.”

Helah wondered, but in her heart was glad. She too would fain return to the God of her youth, but fear prevented her. It was a long walk to the Temple mount, but when they came to the beautiful porch with its triple row of white marble pillars, he said:

“ Rejoice now, mother, we are near Jehovah’s holy Temple.”

But she was afraid; and when they entered the court, where all who are “ clean ” may worship, she drew her robe close to her and said:

“ Nay, I fear that I may unwittingly touch what is most holy, and I be slain, as they that stayed the ark from falling when the Philistines sent it back long years ago.”

“ Nay, think not so evil of the Lord and ascribe to Him the results of accident as punishment for sin the heart never contemplated. Let us seek good Jeremiah, and learn of him.”

But first he cast himself upon the floor and prayed with all his heart that God would give him light and bring his mother back to the true faith.

Jeremiah was calling from the steps. Some listened and laughed, some called him mad, and others believed.

“ My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my heart; my heart maketh a noise in me. I can not hold my peace, because thou hast heard, oh, my soul! the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war!”

“ Ha, ha, ha!” cried some.

“ He is mad!” cried others.

Asaph looked at them.

“Peace!” he cried. “Let us listen to him!”

“The whole city shall flee for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb upon rocks; every city shall be forsaken, and not a man dwell therein!”

Just then the dust rose up from the galloping horsemen in the valley, and they could see the shining of their armor and hear the cries of the people; so they scattered in every direction, adding their cries, “The Chaldeans are upon us—oh, oh, oh!” to the general confusion. Helah and Asaph alone remained with Jeremiah.

“Oh, prophet of the living God! teach us His laws!” cried Asaph, touching his robe and bowing his head.

“Ah! I know that voice. Was not this the slave girl?” cried Jeremiah.

“Asaph, to thee, and thy willing servant. This is my mother, who in her youth sung in the Temple, worshiping the true God, but false teachers and the example of kings and priests led her for awhile astray. She would return.”

Helah bowed her head and said:

“Moloch has marred the beauty of my boy. Jehovah would not thus deface His perfect work. Moloch has destroyed my home and kindred. Jehovah delights to comfort the widow and the fatherless. Teach me again to praise His holy name.” In prostrating himself, Asaph’s turban had fallen from his head and his golden hair fell down in a shower upon his shoulders.

“Ah! why this disguise?” asked the prophet.

“My mother fears Jehoiakim’s wrath. In this disguise

we have visited Jerusalem and seen the ruins of our home. My mother is very sad, so we live in a cave outside the walls, but return each morning and sell fish in the market. May we not come each day, and learn of thee, and worship in the Temple?"

"Thou mayest, and glory be to God that thou wouldst serve Him!"

Then they took leave of him, descended the stairs, and went out of the Gate of the Fountain. They stopped at the beautiful pool of Siloam and refreshed themselves; then passed down through the valley to their cave.

After the goats were milked, and they had eaten their evening meal, Asaph told his mother all about his visits to the king's garden, and his acquaintance with the little princess.

"She has something of importance to tell me to-night; thou wilt not fear to have me go; I will be prudent."

"I trust thee, my son," was all she said.

CHAPTER XIV.

ELIA AND ASAPH.

WHEN night fell, but before the moon arose, Asaph was on the wall of the king's garden.

“Asaph!” said a soft voice.

“It is I,” he replied.

“Make no noise, the guard is doubled; descend by the priests' stairs. I will await thee there.”

Asaph crept along on his hands and knees, then softly descended.

“Come quickly to my pavilion. Cleo is there with a light.”

Soon they were in the beautiful chamber, where heavy gold-inwrought purple hangings screened the windows, that no tell-tale light should inform the guards.

Cleo made obeisance to the floor, then quickly placed cakes and fruit upon a gilded table, saying:

“Eat, prince with sun-god's hair.”

Elia placed for him a stool, each corner of which was ornamented with a queer carved gilded head.

“Sit, and we will speak.”

Then she set upon the table a beautiful goblet of fine gold, with flaring lips, like a lily flower, but with the petals drawn down gradually to almost a point, then widening out to a finely molded lion's head, the mouth open and forming the stand.

“Here is new wine to gladden thy heart. Wilt thou not drink?”

“Wine? I know not what it is.”

“’Tis but the juice of the grape pressed out but yesterday.”

To please her, Asaph touched the goblet to his lips and broke a cake in two.

“For me?” asked Elia, smiling and taking up the other half.

“Oh, princess! all are thine.”

“For me, my brother?” she asked again, without noticing his words.

“Ay, little maid.” She seemed such a child to him.

“With many thanks for all thy kindness.”

Now Elia was happy; she eat the portion of cake, and touched her lips where he had touched his.

“I have something to tell you; thou needst not fear for Jerusalem, my father has bought peace of the King of Babylon.”

“I am glad for my mother’s sake; but will it not be a heavy burden to the poor to pay the tribute?”

“I know not of the poor, good brother; here in the palace gold is so plentiful that I would willingly give it to save our people’s lives.”

“Were I a man, I would offer the king myself to fight for Judah.”

“To-day the ambassadors came from Nebuchadnezzar, and I sat quietly behind the hangings, and heard all, to glad thy heart with the tidings. Our fighting men who came in advance to warn my father were worn and spent,

their horses almost dead with fatigue. I heard them tell my father how the great king had tarried at the parting of the road, and consulted the images, and looked into the river, and threw his polished arrows into the air; when one fluttered toward Jerusalem, they hastened hither with the tidings."

"I saw them ride through the market-place, and the people fled in terror, thinking the enemy had come."

"That was thy handsome mother with thee in the market? Why hast thou need to sell fish, and why disguise?"

"Dumah was our enemy, but he being dead, my mother yearned to see Jerusalem, but fearing Jehoiakim might still desire my death, she took these means to learn what she could, and also to visit her beautiful home; but, alas! a heap of stones greeted her; no kin was left, so she and I were all alone."

Asaph drooped his head, and the tears came at the remembrance.

"Weep not, my brother, for am not I a sister to thee? I will plead thy cause with my father."

"Nay, gentle princess: the time is not yet propitious. Then, too, in this disguise I can daily worship in the Temple."

"Turn thy head, gentle Asaph; the cruel scar of Moloch makes me hate that wicked god. Turn thy side of beauty, that I, too, may praise thy God of loving-kindness."

"Canst thou not come daily to the Temple, too, so shall we bow together to the great Jehovah?"

"Ay, with Cleo as a guard."

“Cleo go; Cleo no like burning god, Cleo worship him god,” pointing to Asaph.

So it was arranged that at a certain hour each day they should meet together at the New Gate of the Temple, and learn of Jeremiah, and worship with all reverence the God of Israel in His holy Temple.

“My mother and I will come each day to the market. By so doing we can tell when the right time comes to throw off our disguise and claim our own.”

“Thou knowest best, yet it pains me to see thee with those common people, who are not worthy to gaze upon thy face.”

Asaph smiled.

“At present I am but poor like themselves—oh, even poorer, for I dare not show my face or tell my name!”

“I am glad, or that girl who stands beside thee would worship thy fair beauty. I like her not.”

Cleo showed her teeth.

“She eat him with her eyes—ugh!”

“I will send a guard to put her from the market!” cried Elia, angrily.

“Nay, that is not to worship the Merciful One. Oh, princess, her father is a Levite; do her no harm for his sake. Why shouldst thou even look upon her? She is beneath thee.”

And so Asaph pacified her.

“I must return now to my mother; thou, too, wilt love her, oh, princess! when thou knowest how good and gentle she is.”

“ I love her now ! ” cried Elia. “ Tell her so for me. ”

Asaph made a deep obeisance.

“ Thanks for what thou hast told me. ”

“ Be wary, ” she whispered ; and he was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

JEHOIAKIM BREAKS HIS ALLEGIANCE TO NEBUCHAD-NEZZAR.

So the time passed on. Helah and Asaph still sold fish in Jerusalem, and went each day to the Temple, but nothing occurred to cause her to reveal herself.

Asaph increased in stature and in wisdom and in the affections of the little princess, in whose friendship Helah also found comfort. Elia was always jealously guarded by the faithful Cleo, who soon felt that she belonged to them all.

Asaph understood from Jeremiah's preaching that a terrible fate was overhanging Jerusalem unless the children of Israel returned wholly to the true God and repented of their sins. Worship was still occasionally held in the Temple, and some offerings were brought, but all the heathen gods were also worshiped, and the poor were oppressed, and some of the most beneficent laws, given by Jehovah for their physical as well as their moral welfare, were constantly violated.

There was a powerful Egyptian faction among the nobles and people who laughed to scorn all Jeremiah's prophecies. Their faith in Jehovah was so weak that they did not believe the prophet's words came from him, so they looked upon Jeremiah as a brawling disturber of the

peace of the city. Egypt was powerful, Egypt would help them, and their walls were strong, for only a portion had been torn down, that too by their brothers, the Israelites, during the siege of King Josiah. They need not fear.

But there were still many who had never turned aside from the faith of their fathers, and they believed Jeremiah.

Asaph also believed him implicitly; so, daily after the market was over, he exercised in all sorts of feats of strength, skill, and endurance, such as running, jumping, shooting at a mark. He had also learned strange things in these years in the cave, and mornings and nights in the wilderness. He could imitate the call of any animal, then answer like its mate; this he practiced till he could summon almost any denizen of the forest to him, and even the birds of the air. He stored in his mind all sorts of knowledge of plants and trees and roots and flowers.

“All this may be helpful to my people when trouble comes,” he would think; so every day he increased in knowledge and strength.

Haggith still brought her flowers to the market, for the dwellers outside the walls felt more secure now that Nebuchadnezzar had accepted of the tribute and withdrawn his army. Her dress was gayer, and her little arts to attract Asaph were more numerous; but he rarely spoke to her; so she had to content herself with gazing at him. Cleo and she were deadly enemies, though they had never spoken a word to each other, but their looks were expressive enough.

It was now the third year of the vassalage of Jerusalem and the children of Judah, and the bonds chafed them, for they could now neither war with their enemies nor assist their friends the Egyptians—and they had ever a loving heart for Egypt, that home of their first adoption, that had fed them with the fat of the land in the time of their sore need—that land in which their forefather Jacob, the Israelite from whom they had all been named, had dwelt; that land in which their ancestor Joseph had been so highly honored, and in which the twelve tribes had so increased and multiplied that they were a menace to the reigning power; that land to which they had come as simple shepherds, but had been educated in the arts and sciences of a polished nation, and had been given land and liberty by the kind pharaoh.

These traditions had been handed down from generation to generation, and the years of slavery and misery under a pharaoh that “knew not Joseph” was quite forgotten, the pleasant things being remembered longest, as it is to this day.

Jehoiakim was watching an opportunity to throw off the yoke of Babylon, so when he heard rumors that Nebuchadnezzar was then on an expedition against Egypt, he refused to pay the annual tribute.

The news soon spread over the city, and the people were in ecstasies of delight. So the next day the valleys around Jerusalem where there were any green trees, and all the little eminences and high places, were thronged with people in holiday attire, who burned incense, each for themselves, and there was feasting and dancing and merriment.

But Asaph and his mother remained in their cave, covered with sackcloth and ashes, prostrate before the Lord. They fasted all day till the sun went down, weeping and beseeching God to pardon the errors of His backsliding children.

“ Oh, God of Israel! some of them are so young they know not Thy law. Their pastors have let them stray like lost sheep. Oh, bring them again into Thy fold. Let not Israel be lost forever!”

Then they arose and purified themselves, and eat and drank, and gave thanks.

“ If God has broken our bondage to the Babylonians, my son, we too should be glad, though not as—”

“ My mother, Jeremiah says our hopes are in vain about Egypt helping us, that our loved city will be overthrown and Jehoiakim subdued by Nebuchadnezzar; so, my mother, it is not yet a time for joy.”

When night fell they went up the valley and stood upon the mount that overlooked the city—the beautiful Mount of Olives. What a sight burst upon their eyes! Every house-top and every street in Jerusalem appeared to be on fire. Clouds of incense arose in the air, and music and singing sounded loud and joyous.

“ They are praising the hosts of heaven. Oh, my mother! I can not watch them thus insult their kind loving Father. Oh, why do they mistake the works of his hands for the great Jehovah Himself?”

So in sorrow they returned to their cave.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAGGITH DISGRACED.

“If her father had but spit in her face, should she not abide outside the camp for seven days?”

THE next morning the market-place was crowded. The people bought everything, they seemed so elated with joy at their recovered freedom.

“Now what dost thou think of the predictions of that brawler?” asked a Hebrew with an Egyptian cast of countenance of the woman who sold leeks and garlic.

“I have not the time, good master, to listen to every one who calls from the house-tops. I have my garden to weed and my water to draw. Have some leeks, my master, they are green and fresh.”

He bought some leeks and a string of garlic, laughed, and passed on.

Haggith wore a new garment and ribbons in her hair. She had even tinged her cheeks with rosy paint; a ring of gold was in her nose, and she seemed to feel as if she were irresistible in her gorgeousness. She smiled at Asaph when he came with his basket of fish, and said:

“Is not the good news welcome? Last night I danced and sung with joy; but why dost thou look so grave?”

He had turned as she spoke to him, and had noticed her paint, and her jewels, and a slight frown clouded his face.

“What! dost thou not like my pretty clothes? I hoped

they would please thee; and see, I plucked this bunch of rarest roses all for thee!"

She held them out to him. Just then a shadow fell on her basket; she looked up—there stood her father, white with rage.

"Is this my daughter? I cry thy pardon if I am wrong, but where didst get this jewel in thy nose, and this fine garment? Ay, wanton wretch, with painted face, is it thus thou robbest me?" Then he looked at Asaph from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet. "And is this the pretty boy? Young master, thou dost not well to accept presents from a poor market-girl."

Asaph looked him steadily in the face.

"Levite, I have never accepted aught from the maiden."

Then her father turned to her in still greater rage. "So, unsought, thou wouldst bestow thy charms upon a stranger—wouldst throw thyself at one unwilling to receive thee? Out upon thee, unnatural child! My gold, my stolen gold! Ugh! I spit upon thee, ingrate!"

And with the word he spat in her face, shook his staff, and turned aside.

For a moment Haggith's eyes blazed with anger; she half raised her hand, then it dropped by her side, her head sunk lower and lower upon her breast, then a sob of shame and anguish burst from her lips, and taking her basket from the ground she hastened from the market-place.

The princess and Cleo had witnessed the whole scene from a little distance. Elia was shocked, but Cleo said:

“ Her proud; her too much proud. Ha! ha! new dress! father tear him soon; she cry. Cleo glad!”

They approached Helah and greeted her, but she looked sad, being sorry for the poor misguided flower-girl, and Asaph was pale with pity at the unhappy scene, and tears stood in his eyes. Cleo noticed it and said:

“ No cry for her; she eat!”

Asaph did not yet know all the strange old customs and the strict laws of “uncleanness,” so he wondered at Hag-gith’s leaving the market with her flowers unsold, when buyers were so many and so willing.

“ I am so happy to-day, Asaph. Wilt thou not rejoice with me?” Elia said in a low tone. “ I heard my father say that all the fighting men of Judah must be ready to join Egypt when he comes, but he thought no battle would be necessary, as Babylon would flee before the united strength of Miriam and Judah.”

Asaph could not have the heart to cloud her joy. When Jeremiah’s terrible predictions came true she would have sorrow enough, even with all his efforts to comfort her, for with his mother she formed part of all his plans.

Just then the old man whom he had often befriended with fish and honey stopped before him.

“ Old Shalmai has something to tell thee, thou descendant of the sons of God. Come aside to the vacant place of the gate, there we can sit and converse unnoticed.”

Asaph spoke to his mother, then turning to the princess he said, in a low tone:

“ I will see thee at the Temple, and thou shalt tell me more. Peace be with thee!” then he went with Shalmai.

Even the vacant place was crowded; but seeing the old man with his white flowing beard leaning on his staff, several youths quickly offered him their seats.

“Thanks, kind masters, may Jehovah pour His blessings on you all,” and he sat; but Asaph stood before him and listened respectfully.

“I came to tell thee that when the trouble comes and the daughter of Zion mourns upon her hills, my house is open to thee and thine. Poverty no more binds us with its chains; a Moabitish debtor paid me yesterday a sum of money long since due and mourned as lost; but Jehovah put it in his heart to pay, and now my old age is free from want, blessed be His name! At the further end of the street that runs to the Water Gate thou wilt see a small house with a date-palm by the door, in the center is a garden with vines what make a bower, hanging full of rich ripe grapes; on these hast thy servant lived for many days. Put thy hand in the hole of the door, the latch will raise at thy touch, enter—all therein is thine.”

“My father, thou hast my thanks, for when Jerusalem is in anguish I shall suffer with her, and perchance shall accept thy offered kindness. Bless me, now, my father, and let me go.”

He did so, and they both returned to the market.

Helah had sold nearly all the fish, and seeing so many happy faces about her, she also was smiling. Asaph looked at her, then softly murmured to himself:

“Why should she not be happy? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Then he took his place beside her.

It was not long before all their fish were sold, and having eaten a frugal meal in the market, they purified themselves at one of the many fountains, then went to the Temple mount.

There was quite a concourse listening to the prophet, most of them in holiday attire. As usual, there was a mixed crowd. Jeremiah was calling from the New Gate, toward the descent, so that all could hear:

“Behold ye trust in lying words that can not profit!*

“Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods, whom ye know not;

“And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations.

“Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.”

“Ought he not to be ashamed to speak so openly to the multitude?” said a painted woman. “For if some of us have good friends who give us presents, and we are not so stiff and prudish as others, he need not call us vile names!”

And she looked leeringly at the young man whom she had addressed.

“Seest thou what they do in cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough

* Jeremiah, vii Chapter, 8 to 11 verses.

to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Behold, my anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place!"

"What harm do we in worshiping the gentle queen of heaven? Does she not give us light without us even asking her?" said a pretty maiden.

Again Jeremiah thundered forth:

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Put your burned offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh. For spake I not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burned offerings or sacrifices. But this thing commended I them, saying: Obey my voice and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; but they hearkened not, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward—"

"There! I told thee that we were just wasting our kids and lambs, burning them up in the Temple!" cried a shrewish woman to her white-haired husband.

But Jeremiah spoke again:

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: I have made the earth, the man, and the beast by my great power. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, my servant—"

"Treason! treason!" the people shouted, and scattered in all directions, several throwing stones at him as they went.

But Asaph and his mother, and the young princess, attended by Cleo, remained and worshiped in the Temple.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUARREL BETWEEN HAGGITH AND CLEO.

THE days passed peacefully, all rumors of war had ceased, and some of the people were haughtier and more oppressive to the poor, and broke God's laws oftener than ever before, living in sensual luxury, gathering gold by short measures and light weights, and utterly forgetting the God of their fathers.

This was but the calm preceding the storm.

Asaph wondered why Haggith came no more to the market-place. But Elia was glad, and Cleo grinned. Several days passed, then Asaph asked his mother.

"It is an old law of Moses, my son, that she is unclean, and must abide without the camp seven days," she replied.

Although Asaph was sorry for any creature that suffered, yet he felt more comfortable without Haggith's near presence.

Cleo went to the market by herself one morning, and making a low obeisance to Asaph, she said:

"Master, tell Cleo where girl live; she—she sell flowers. Cleo want buy—um!—something!"

"I know not where she lives. Did the princess send thee to me?"

"Um! she not know. Me, Cleo, want her—want buy—um!—something!"

“Dost thou want Haggith, the Levite’s daughter, that sells flowers here in the market?” asked the woman who sold citrons and leeks.

Cleo grinned and nodded.

“Go out the furtherest gate by the Tower of the Furnaces, then walk five minutes straight before ye, then shall ye come to her father’s house. Ye can tell it by the smell of roses and violets from the garden.”

“Thanks! Cleo buy leeks—another time,” and she passed on smiling.

“Whose is yon pert Ethiopian slave, good master?” asked the woman, of Asaph.

“Her mistress’s, good mother,” he replied, smiling.

“And who may be her mistress?”

“Ask her when next thou seest her,” then, thinking this sounded discourteous, he added, “I betray no woman’s secrets, good mother.”

“Ha, ha, ha! Thou art a fine lad, and I would I were thy mother,” she cried.

But Asaph turned away; he did not relish the jesting and gossip of the market, neither did Helah, who looked a little vexed.

Cleo, having hired a little ass, at length reached the home of Haggith. She stood before it some time, examining its poverty and comparing it in her mind with the magnificent palace in which she lived. She shrugged her shoulders, and curling her lip in scorn, she said:

“She poor! she mean! she no good!”

Then she dismounted from the ass and knocked loudly

at the door. She could hear a bar removed, then Haggith opened the door; the slave stared her in the face.

“Cleo come to buy garlic!” she cried, loudly.

Haggith flushed red.

“We sell naught but choicest flowers.”

“No? Cleo no want flowers. Cleo want garlic for two pennies.”

“I tell thee, slave, we do not sell it!” cried Haggith, very angry, for she had recognized her instantly, and understood her coming was only for insult.

“Cleo call him father; he sell it. Oh, him like money!”

“I tell thee, Ethiopian slave, we do not pollute our ground with the vile odor!”

“Me no Ethiopian slave. Me Cleo—Cleo father no spit in her face.”

Haggith was white with rage.

“Vile slave! go back to them that sent thee, and tell the wanton I will complain to the king!”

Cleo laughed loudly. Just then Zaccur entered the house from the garden.

“Softly, softly! Why this confusion of angry words?”

“Cleo come to buy garlic. Girl angry!” and she held out the two pennies.

“We do not sell it!” he replied, looking covetously at the money.

“So I told the slave; father, ’tis a trick. She belongs to the damsel that has so much gold and comes each day to the market. They are spies!”

“Aha! what sayest the slave? Shall I have thee put behind the prison bars?”

“Cleo no ’fraid,” she replied, defiantly.

“There, there! thou didst forget; ’twas garlands thy mistress wanted. Give me the money, and I will get thee one, but only a little one for so small a sum.”

“Cleo no want garlands; take money, give piece swine-flesh.”

Zaccur foamed with rage.

“Jehovah’s wrath fall on thee, thou impious wretch!” he cried.

But she had jumped upon her ass, and, laughing, waved her hand, then quickly rode away, saying:

“She no look at him with sun-god’s hair any more. Cleo make her shamed.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEATH OF JEHOIAKIM.

THE calm had passed away and the storm had broken on Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, finding the Egyptians would not fight with him at this time, and hearing that Jehoiakim, relying on their help, had refused his annual tribute, came with all his vast army against Jerusalem.

The people were terror-stricken, not being prepared to fight or to endure a siege; they could do nothing but wring their hands and weep and moan, calling on all the gods to help them, and tardily, in their last extremity, calling also on the great Jehovah.

Jeremiah still continued to thunder in the king's and people's ears.

“Now, therefore, hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the King of Babylon.

“For they prophesy a lie unto you to remove you far from your land, and ye should perish.

“But the nations that bring their necks under the yoke of the King of Babylon and serve him, those will I let still in their own land, saith the Lord, and they shall till it and dwell therein.”

So Jehoiakim, in his extremity, caught at the only hope

held out to him and believed Jeremiah, and opened all the gates of Jerusalem!

The army swarmed in like locusts that devastated Egypt—Chaldeans, Medes, Persians, Phœnicians, Syrians, Ammonites, Moabites—all their old enemies, forced into a willing service by their great conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar.

At the “Gates Beautiful” Jehoiakim stood with his retinue. When Nebuchadnezzar approached he gave him the keys of the city, prostrating himself three times before him, in token of submission.

But from every gate and every street shrieks of agony reached Jehoiakim’s ears; the flower of his people, both youth and maidens, old men and women, were being ruthlessly murdered by the cruel invaders. He had not long to bear the agony of suspense, for Nebuchadnezzar was wroth with fierce anger to think that he had dared to rebel against his power. He, the king of but the remnant of Judah, to bring him thus away from greater things, the siege of Tyre, the subduing of Egypt, so giving him a look of hatred, he thrust his sword through his body, and while the carcass was still warm, he commanded it to be thrown outside the walls, and to be given the burial of an ass.

Then Nebuchadnezzar commanded the trumpets to be sounded, and as the great army came together, he took his princes and councilors, and they proceeded in their chariots to the king’s palace.

Here he sat upon the throne, and commanded Jehoiakim’s family to be brought before him.

Coniah, as he was lovingly called, a gentle youth of

eighteen, the only son of the king, came before him submissively and bowed prostrate to the floor.

“Arise,” said Nebuchadnezzar; then seeing he was young and mild, he was very favorably impressed with him, and taking the crown he placed it upon his head and called him Jehoiakim. Then all the people shouted:

“Long live the king!”

Then Nebuchadnezzar communicating to him his wishes as to the tribute and government, left the palace, and with his vast army, together with three thousand captives and the young Ezekiel, retired from Jerusalem.

The haughty, cruel Jehoiakim lay dead outside the walls. His beauty was disfigured by being dragged over the sharp stones and refuse of the city; there he lay for the birds of the air to feed on and the vultures to tear out his eyes—those eyes that had never looked in pity on any of his people—and the heat of the day caused the insects to buzz about his face, and the frost of night wet his garments, and there were none to lament him, saying: “Oh, my brother, oh, lord!” or “Ah, his glory!”

Those of his own household, if they mourned for him, did so in secret, for they feared spies were in the land to report to the great king aught done contrary to his wishes.

* * * * *

When Jerusalem had settled once more into peace and quietness, happy in the change of kings, expecting from Coniah's youth and gentle disposition a milder and more merciful reign, Helah and Asaph presented themselves before him with a petition for their recognition and the restoration of their land.

Jehoiakim sat on the throne of his fathers attired in the magnificent robes of state. His councilors surrounded him, also the princes, ancients and wise men; he wished their advice and help on this his first day of public audience to his people.

Asaph, his fair skin cleansed from all stain of saffron, his golden hair falling in wavy masses upon his shoulders, his dress rich and becoming, was most attractive in his beauty, and Helah was a fitting companion.

Hope lighted up their countenances with radiant light as they prostrated themselves before Jehoiakim.

“ Oh, King of Judah, be merciful and tender, and hear now the prayer of thy servant Helah, the wife of Ashbel, of the tribe of Judah!”

“ Arise, and speak thy wish,” said Jehoiakim, extending his scepter; then looking at Asaph, he started, but said nothing.

“ Oh, king, when thy father reigned some enemies, unknown to thy servant, did raze her house unto the earth, destroying all her substance and marring all the beauty of the ground; her kin they also destroyed or scattered, so that none are left. Oh, king, to plead her cause, save herself, and this her only son.”

“ What crimes didst thou or thine commit to merit such condign punishment?”

“ None, my lord and king.”

“ Is not this the boy who years ago was being offered up to Moloch?”

“ ’Tis true, oh, king,” said Helah, drooping her head.

“But the great Jehovah saved him, blessed be His name!” cried Asaph, with fervor.

The princes and councilors stood aghast, and a murmur went through the assembly; but the king smiled and said:

“’Tis well; thy life shall not again be put in jeopardy. Take thine inheritance with thy mother. I, the king, shall see that justice, though tardy, is still administered in Jerusalem.”

He raised his scepter as a sign the audience was ended, and Asaph and Helah, bowing low, left the chamber.

The princess met them in the porch; she knew by the expression of their faces that their petition had been granted. Embracing Helah, she said in a low tone:

“Peace be with thee.” Then turning to Asaph: “And may Jehovah pour His blessings on your heads.”

CHAPTER XIX.

SHALMAI'S FEAST.

THE good Shalmal had awaited them at the entrance to the palace. Asaph had been a true friend to him in his time of need, providing him with much food, and a milking goat, so he was very anxious to know the result of their visit to the king.

“ Ah, all is well; and thou art free!” he cried as soon as he saw them. “ Now thy son dare hold up his head before all the world, undisguised and undismayed. Young master, thy faith in the God of Israel has been rewarded. Wilt please you both to come to thy servant’s house; he has a little feast prepared. Oh, say not nay, for thy servant hath set his heart upon this thing!”

Helah looked at Asaph.

“ Shall we not thus give thanks, my son?”

Asaph’s heart had gone out to the old man, so he said:

“ Yes, my mother, it is meet a little joy should fall to thy lot, and thanks to thee, my father, for thy thoughtfulness.”

It was a pleasant walk to Shalmal’s house. The people on the streets seemed so happy save those who had lost loved ones by the cruel invaders, and they greeted Helah and Asaph with smiles; the romantic story of their disguise and restoration to their patrimony had spread swiftly over the city, and many recognized in Asaph the beau-

tiful boy who had escaped the fires of Moloch. So the news of their approach passed from mouth to mouth, and many gathered at the corners and greeted them on their way, Asaph bowed with simple dignity, but Helah smiled, and when old-time acquaintances grasped her hand and bid her welcome to their houses; her heart was glad; she felt at home again.

Shalmal was a magnificent specimen of the tribe of Dan—hair long, a beard that reached below his waist, and as soft and shiny as the silk of Damascus, piercing black eyes, and a most fascinating smile; he would have attracted attention in any age or country. His friends also greeted him, now that he was no longer a poor man, and also wore a good garment.

So their progress was a continual ovation, the women and maidens occasionally throwing flowers in their path, and little green boughs.

Haggith, coming from the market-place, caught sight of them, her cheeks flushed, and she ran swiftly until she stood by Asaph's side.

"Ah! the fish-boy, so white and beautiful! I suspected a mystery! Art—art thou a prince?" she asked, softly.

"I am naught but what thou seest," he replied, turning away.

But Haggith walked along with the crowd, and when she saw the other maids throw flowers, she emptied her basket in his path, forgetting the beating she would receive for not having either them or the money to give her father.

At length they reached the house; it was a delightful

spot, for the street was wider here, and the houses not so close together, being the outskirts of the city.

At the door stood Shalmal's wife and daughter to welcome them. As they entered, he said:

"Peace be with you all."

"And Jehovah's blessing!" replied old Sara.

Then Shalmal took the basin and pitcher from Adah's hand, and bending his knee, he removed Helah's and Asaph's sandals, and washed their feet, then he poured water over their hands and wiped them with the towel the maiden held ready.

Asaph looked bewildered and flushed with a gentle shame.

"It is an old custom of our fathers," Helah whispered.

The feast was spread, and Asaph and his mother were given the places of honor, on divans placed at the middle of the table, with a soft mat for their feet, their sandals being at the door.

A roast lamb, whole, as at the Passover, was in the center, decked with flowers—as an unusual honor—then around it were placed white wheaten cakes and succulent vegetables, oil cakes with much spice, and figs and dates pressed into little circular masses. Grapes with their green leaves, and milk and honey, and tall graceful pitchers of wine completed the feast.

A blessing was asked by the venerable Shalmal, then he broke the bread, and giving a piece to each, the meal began.

It was indeed a feast to Asaph, who had never sat at

table before with any other save his mother and little Elia; and Shalmai was well versed in the ancient history of their nation, and his conversation was like a stream of light to the mind of Asaph.

“The Hebrews are a stiff-necked people. Jehovah’s strong hand chastised them again and again to keep them in the right path, but at every temptation they turned aside to idolatry and all manner of evil. The great God had permitted their offering to Him of the blood and fat and flesh of animals because the heart of man in his gratitude or in his petitions for favors, must give gifts, and this people imitating the example of the nations around them, were offering their gifts to idols, so He commanded them to bring them to Himself instead—for Jeremiah our prophet has said that God did not require sacrifice of animals, but obedience. So also Hosea hath said, ‘Oh, Israel, return unto the Lord thy God. Take with you words. Say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips.’ ”

These words sunk deep in Asaph’s mind, to be often pondered on in after times.

As Helah listened to the old man, all her childhood came before her like a dream long forgotten, that comes back with a word, the scent of a flower, or a strain of music, and she rejoiced that she had once been permitted to sing in the holy Temple, and worship the true God in the reign of the good Josiah, and from this day she turned no more to idolatry.

When the feast was ended and they had purified them-

selves, they went into the court, and sitting on rugs enjoyed the beautiful fountain and the trees and flowers that grew around it. The birds sung sweetly, and the bees hummed drowsily; the scene was one of peaceful beauty.

At length the time came for their departure, and Shalmai said:

“When the sword shall come upon Jerusalem, make this thy home, good master, and bring thy mother at the first alarm.”

“Remember, thou wilt be most welcome,” said the aged Sara; but Adah stood silent and blushing with downcast eyes.

The whole family accompanied them some distance on their way, and then left them with many blessings.

Helah and Asaph went to their cave; they would dwell in no one's house till their own was completed.

* * * * *

Every day for many weeks they came to Jerusalem and watched the walls of their habitation slowly arise. The young king had ordered it to be built even more beautiful than it was at first.

Jehoiakim was well loved by his people for his kindness and his thoughtful measures for their good; but he turned not from worshipping many idols, so God was not with him, and his reign was short.

CHAPTER XX.

JEHOIAKIM TAKEN CAPTIVE.

THREE months had scarcely passed away, when the city was again in a state of wild alarm, for again Nebuchadnezzar's vast army surrounded Jerusalem.

Spies had reported that Jehoiakim was meditating revenge for the cruel murder of his father, and Nebuchadnezzar, who was in the full flush of his ambition to extend his kingdom from the Euphrates to the Nile, could not brook that the least of his vassals should rebel against his authority, but still having the siege of Tyre to occupy his attention, he sent commanders with his army, but he himself did not come.

From the highest point of the Temple, to which Jeremiah had taken him, Asaph beheld the Chaldeans and their many allies, swarming from the north-west, and on their nearer approach spreading over the level plateau to the north, thence down the valleys of Jehosaphat and Hinnon, they were countless, and covered the earth till it looked like one moving mass.

How could one little city, weakened by luxury and forsaken by God, defend herself against this vast multitude of bitter, hasty men? And his mother and the princess, would they fare as well in this second invasion as they had before? He could fight, but what had King Jehoiakim decided to do? The gates of the city were doubly barred

and locked; had he known it in time, he could have taken them to the cave, but now— Just then he saw the princess ascending the stairs that led up from the city of David, as he hastened down from the great height where he stood, and met her at the New Gate. After the usual greetings she said:

“I have come to ask Jehovah’s help for my poor brother, and for our unhappy people.”

So they joined Helah, who was already on her knees. After they had prayed, and wet the marble floor with their tears, they arose, and Asaph said:

“Oh, princess, disguise thyself as one of Jerusalem’s poor, so will my mother and myself, and bring thy slave to carry thy little treasures, and we will abide with the venerable Shalmai till all danger is past.”

“Oh! I can not forsake my brother; he is kind and gentle. I would be by his side in his great trouble. Is not this as Jehovah would wish it?”

“Little princess, listen to me. Thy brother will only be impeded in what he desires to do by many around him claiming his protection. Thy brother has done no wrong, and the King of Babylon, being so convinced, can not find it in his heart to do so gentle a young man harm; but thou art a maiden, very young and fair, and the soldiers are cruel men, and fearless of the great Jehovah, they might do thee such wrong that death were preferable. So disguise thyself and come with us. When Jerusalem is at peace again, thou shalt return to thy brother. I will wait for thee at the palace gate.”

Helah added her entreaties, so at last she consented, and hastened away to get ready.

* * * * * *

Jehoiakim sat in council with his princes, rulers, and wise men, and when they saw how hopeless it would be to fight against this vast horde, he said:

“I would not that my people should meet with such cruel deaths as these men, angered by resistance, would put them to; my eyes could not endure to see this fair city of the mountains laid waste and devastated even to the ground. I will open my gates, as Jeremiah counseleth, and tell great Babylon I have not rebelled against his power.”*

Then the council broke up, and messengers were sent outside the walls to demand an audience.

They soon returned and communicated their message to the king, who immediately commanded all the gates of Jerusalem to be opened wide.

Elia, hearing this, quickly put on a disguise, and gathering her jewels and a little stuff, put them in the hands of Cleo, and together they hastened to the palace gate. Helah and Asaph were awaiting them. She informed them of all she had heard, and then they proceeded hurriedly to the house of Shalmal.

They were warmly welcomed by all the family, and when they were informed who Elia was, they prostrated themselves before her and vowed to protect her with their lives.

When Asaph had thus placed them in safety, he went, still in disguise, to the principal gate to watch events.

* Sanhedrim.

“It will all be well,” he thought, “for has not Jeremiah said we shall stay in our own land if we serve the King of Babylon?”

Then his heart fell as he thought how, relying on these words, the gates had been opened once before and the king had been cruelly murdered, and many of the choicest people of the city with him, and many taken away captive. He believed in Jeremiah, yet could not understand how his prophesying and what really came to pass could be so different.

The gates were opened; the king, his mother, wives, princes, and officers, went forth to meet the commanders sent by the great Nebuchadnezzar. He surrendered on condition that they would respect their persons and do them no injury, and that beautiful Jerusalem should suffer no harm. The commanders gave their oaths to that effect, and did not enter the city, but they remained in the vicinity with much of their army.

Jerusalem was in a miserable state of uncertainty, the commerce and industrial pursuits of the people were almost entirely neglected, and the internal improvements of the city were at a stand-still.

But this was soon ended, for before many months the commanders broke their oaths, entered Jerusalem, bound the king, and took him to Babylon, together with his family, princes, officers, and servants, together with ten thousand of the principal people, seven thousand men of war, and one thousand citizens, a part of these being from the adjacent country. They also took all the treasures of gold and precious stones, and beautiful furnishings of the king's

palaces and houses, and—what pained the older people to the heart—the magnificent, valuable, sacred things belonging to the holy Temple.

Then Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiakim's uncle, Mataniah, King of Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. He bound him in oaths that he would serve him faithfully, and not change the form of government, but keep the kingdom for him, and make no allegiance with his enemy, Egypt.

Thus, half of the city and the surrounding villages were carried into captivity, amid the lamentations of those who were left behind.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SEASON OF PEACE.

PEACE once more settled upon poor, widowed Jerusalem. The people went looking mournful and sad, afraid to lament aloud, or even to take any pleasure in life.

Helah's house was but just finished when Zedekiah began his reign, so she, together with Asaph, had lived with the hospitable Shalmai, but she had insisted on providing at least a portion of the subsistence of the family.

"Lest we feel too dependent, good Shalmai," she had said, and so he had let her have her way.

Asaph had drunk the old man's words as dew from heaven, for Shalmai was a Jew of advanced opinions; he had studied his religion from the days of Abraham to the Prophet Jeremiah, thoughtfully praying to God for light to see into what was obscure or contradictory, so that he might not offend or violate the law, not of Moses, not of the judges, who were but fallible men, but of Jehovah himself. Men's laws that came in conflict with that were to him as nothing, and he was ready, even with his life, to obey the God of gods.

The Princess Elia had not been included among the captives, on account of Asaph's thoughtful ingenuity; now she was returned to her uncle and his children, who were glad to welcome her as one from the dead, and her romantic story so interested them that they determined that

Asaph should some day be sent for to come to the palace.

Helah's house was now furnished and ready for occupancy. So the time came to bid farewell to Shalmai and the kind Sara and the beautiful Adah.

They sat at their last evening meal together; it was prepared with extra care and arranged with unusual beauty, for was not one of the sons of God about to leave them, to take away the blessing of his pure heart, his words of wisdom, far beyond his years, the religion of his beauty, for one could not look upon this perfect work, fresh and uncontaminated as when he came from the hands of his Maker, without worshiping the being who was capable of giving such perfection to His children.

As the scar of Moloch had caused the princess to hate idolatry and turn to the true God, so it caused the family of Shalmai to detest with utter detestation all the forms of idol worship that were so prevalent in the land.

Before the meal was finished the venerable Shalmai, who had eaten scarcely anything, began to chant in a melodious voice Solomon's song:

"My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

"His head is as the most fine gold.

"His eyes as the eyes of doves.

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices.

"His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely."

Then the tears filled his eyes and fell down upon his beard. His voice trembling with emotion, he continued:

“Whither is thy beloved gone, oh, thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside?”

Then Sara replied, in a mournful but sweet voice:

“My beloved is gone down into his garden to the bed of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.”

Then Adah took up the strain:

“Thou art beautiful, oh, my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners!”

Then Shalmai embraced Asaph, wept over him and blessed him, then they all sung together:

“Oh, God, forsake me not. I will also praise Thee with the psalter, even Thy truth, oh, my God! Unto Thee will I sing with the harp, oh, thou Holy One of Israel! Let the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and amen!”

Then Asaph and Helah hastened away while the whole family stood at the door weeping.

* * * * *

For awhile Judah felt secure, for they had become allied to the most powerful kingdom of the earth, the great Babylon, and the few fenced cities that yet belonged to it felt now as if they were indeed protected.

Again the city assumed something of its former prosperity. Many of the Jews from the distant cities and plains came to dwell within her walls, and some came because of the Temple to worship there. Merchants came from Syria; they brought beautiful jewelry, and precious stones and embroidered and bright-colored cloths. Damascus sent wool and wine and silk, and Sheba spices and other things, and even peacocks were brought from Tar-

shish. So the fairs and markets were bright and beautiful and animated once more.

The voice of joy was again heard in the land as time passed on, and happy bridal processions and music, and feasting and dancing once more made glad the people.

Asaph had become a scholar in the college of the prophets, where, besides being taught the true religion, he was instructed in the languages of the surrounding nations and the pure ancient Hebrew, that had now become very much corrupted, so that one could scarcely read the Scriptures in the pure language in which they were first written. He was also initiated in all the forms of learning that had been gradually introduced into Jerusalem by their intercourse with educated foreigners.

Helah was happy. She was a most hospitable hostess, and her house was frequented by the learned and wise, and also by those who secretly believed in the God of Israel; these were doubly welcomed, and encouraged to stand firm and not be ashamed of their faith or afraid to proclaim it in the face of the people.

Shalmai was a beloved guest, and each visit was more prized than the one before, and Sara and her beautiful daughter came occasionally.

Asaph ascended each day to the Temple, and Elia was as devout as he, and he never failed to see and speak with her daily, and there grew up in his heart a tender love for her that grew with his growth.

Elia's heart was often sad because of her uncle the king; he was so led away by the wicked men around him, and was unjust and cruel to the poor, of whom there were now

so many in the city. Many times had she cheered the poor prisoners who were thrust out from the king's presence by the spears of his guards by a look of pity or a softly uttered word to the soldiers, who restrained their brutality while she was by.

“Oh, if my uncle would believe wholly in the great Jehovah, he could influence our people for good, and Jerusalem might yet be taken back into the love of the Holy One of Israel.”

But Zedekiah was weak, and swayed first by his bad councilors, then by the prophet Jeremiah, back and forth like a reed shaken by the wind.

* * * * *

One day Haggith went up to the Temple with her father Zaccur, for sometimes services were held there and the law expounded, but it was not the fashionable religion. There she saw Asaph and the princess. She blushed deeply, but gave Elia a look of hatred, yet she dared not speak to Asaph, as her father was by her side.

“Now I know he comes here I can often see him,” she said to herself, with a happy feeling at her heart. So each day, when the market was over, she too went to the Temple.

It was a strange sight to see Jeremiah speaking and exhorting and denouncing with a great wooden yoke about his neck. (The prophets always emphasized their words by material symbols, leaving nothing to the imagination.) Seeing him thus ornamented, the people laughed more than ever, and some said:

“See the crazy seditious fellow; where now are his

prophecies? Poor Comah! he opened the gates, he submitted to the great king, but was he left in his own land? Ha, ha, ha! what a prophet! If thou dost love Nebuchadnezzar so, why dost thou not go thyself to him?"

So Jeremiah did little to convert or turn the mass of the people to the true God. But the king favored the prophet, and when he was in his presence believed him implicitly, and often requested him to ask of God for him by the oracle or otherwise. But for fear of his princes and nobles he did this secretly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRINCESS IS JEALOUS.—ZEDEKIAH REBELS AND
FORTIFIES JERUSALEM.

THUS several years passed away, and the Egyptian faction had become stronger and stronger.

One day Hananiah, who was also a prophet, came to Jeremiah in the Temple, and before all the priests and people who were assembled there said that God had broken the yoke of the King of Babylon, and that in two years the vessels of the house of the Lord would be returned, together with Jeconiah (Coniah) and all the captives. Then Jeremiah said:

“Amen! The Lord do so! Nevertheless, hear now this word that I speak.”

Then he said how the prophets of old had prophesied of war and pestilence against many countries, but that if peace came to pass they would know that the Lord had sent the prophet who foretold it.

Then Hananiah took off Jeremiah's great wooden yoke and broke it to pieces, saying:

“Thus saith the Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years.”

And all the people shouted and rejoiced—Jeremiah with them; and the Egyptian party grew yet stronger.

Asaph wondered why Hananiah had received these good

tidings, and they had not been revealed to his friend Jeremiah; still he was happy at the thought that loved Jerusalem would be soon free from her enemies. He rejoiced to think that the sacred vessels would be so soon returned to the Temple, and prayed that Jehovah would then be worshipped as of old. He had not yet advanced so far in his religion as to feel that old customs and ceremonies were passing away, and that God required a less material but more spiritual worship from his children. He often felt very sad at the general wickedness around him, and would pray with tearful eyes for the people's conversion; especially was he troubled about the king, and poor miserable Haggith, who daily haunted his footsteps, and looked at him with such beseeching eyes.

"Princess," he said one day, "what thinkest thou the Levite's daughter desires? She is pale and thin and seems under the burden of much trouble."

Elia looked at him searchingly.

"Dost thou not know?" she said.

But Asaph's pure heart was as innocent as a child's; so he said hesitatingly:

"Nay; but dost thou think her father beats her?"

The princess laughed softly.

"Oh, Asaph, Asaph, thou art indeed one of the sons of God in thy innocence! Dost thou not know she—loves thee?"

But Asaph blushed red, and was speechless.

The princess watched him closely, then said excitedly:

"Thou dost not love her? If I thought so I—I would *kill* her!"

“ Elia! Oh, princess! that is not to obey the merciful God. Thou shouldst rather pity her for loving one who can scarce abide her presence.”

Cleo was near, and hearing this, fairly danced with joy.

Elia bowed her head, and said in a low tone:

“ Forgive me, my brother.”

So peace was restored between them.

* * * * *

One day, not long after this, Jeremiah ascended the steps of the Temple and cried to Hananiah:

“ Thus saith the Lord: Thou hast broken the yokes of wood ”—for that prophet had also broken his own inconvenient wooden burden—“ but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron upon the necks of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar as King of Babylon; and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Hear now, Hananiah: The Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie! This year thou shalt die because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.”*

Even God’s prophets did not understand His mighty work of converting the whole world, including His loved servant Nebuchadnezzar, who was ever seeking to find the true God, and earnest and determined to have his immense nation bow the knee and worship when that God was found, by this very captivity that the Israelites so strenuously resisted.

The Jews in Babylon were commanded by Jehovah to build houses, to marry, to plant gardens, and seek the peace of the city.

* Jeremiah, xviii Chapter, 14 to 16 verses.

“For I know the thoughts I have toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil.” *

Thus their brothers at home knew they were not harshly treated, and were more like subjects to the king instead of slaves.

Some of them remembered too well how their forefathers had slaughtered indiscriminately men, women, and children whom they had taken captive when forcibly taking possession of the Promised Land, and they rejoiced that so much more mercy was shown their people.

Jeremiah came to the king continually, beseeching him to cease his wickedness; but the Egyptian party was just as assiduous in telling him to believe in himself and his friends the Egyptians. So in the ninth year of his reign he sent ambassadors to the young and ambitious King Waphris, who had but recently mounted the throne of Mirriam with overtures for assistance. When these returned with the most friendly greetings and offers of substantial aid and assistance, Zedekiah at once threw off the yoke and revolted from the King of Babylon.

He commenced immediately to fortify the city and prepare for defense; also to victual it for a possible siege. As fast as horse and rider could carry it, spies bore the news to Nebuchadnezzar.

The men of war were happy; once more their hands grasped the sword and spear, and the bowmen practiced with their bows and arrows, and the slingers with their slings. The strangers and the slaves put every portion of

* Jeremiah, xxix Chapter, 11 verse.

the wall in thorough repair, strengthened the weak places, and built defenses.

The whole city was in a state of intense excitement. Again the people came from their defenseless villages and sought protection behind the stout walls of the city of the mountains.

Helah wept and prayed, and said: —

“Oh, Asaph, my son, what shall we do? Must beautiful, beloved Jerusalem become a prey to her enemies? Hath not the chastening hand of the Almighty been laid heavy enough upon us—thou and I, my son?”

“Jehovah has not punished us, my mother; it was the wicked king and priest. Too many of our people ascribe to our Father of infinite compassion the wicked deeds of men, the sad results of nature’s violated laws, and the irresistible force of adverse circumstances. The God of Israel is a God of love, truth, mercy, and tenderness. My mother, I have wept bitter tears at the cruel things our forefathers ascribed to God, shaking the responsibility of blood and slaughter from their own shoulders, and vilifying the name of the Most High.”

Helah looked at him as one inspired; surely no harm could befall her while he was by her side.

Each day carriers brought word of the nearer approach of the enemy. First, Lachish was besieged and fell, then the little villages, then Azakah and her villages, then on they came, flushed with victory and happy with spoils, their war cries loud and long, their banners flashing in the sun.

Thus the immense army of Babylon gradually surround-

ed Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was terribly incensed at this breaking of a sacred league. Had he not raised some of the sons of Judah to the highest honors of his kingdom? Had he not treated the well-disposed even as a father? Zedekiah should pay dearly for his treachery; so he came in person to direct the siege.

It was a terrible yet beautiful sight from the city of David or from the top of the Temple to watch the glittering mass come nearer and nearer, then spread out like a golden net, and close around the devoted city.

Asaph, clad in habiliments of war, with sword and sling and bow, ascended to the Temple. Jeremiah was speaking more vehemently than ever to those who would listen.

“Thus saith the Lord: Behold I will give this city into the hand of the King of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire, and thou, oh, king, shall not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken.”*

When he rested a moment from speaking, Asaph touched his robe. He turned and, looking at him, cried:

“What! wouldst thou, descendant of the sons of God, disobey thy Father? Why these weapons of slaughter by thy side? Knowest thou not that the Lord hath given this city and people to Nebuchadnezzar, and though thou shouldst fight until thy hands were stiff with blood, yet would God’s will be done.”

Asaph turned away sad and silent, and descended the steps. He believed Jeremiah to truly interpret the Divine will to man, so he would not disobey, although his heart

* Jeremiah, xxix Chapter, 21 verse.

was cruelly torn at the thought of the city he now so loved being broken and burned and devastated, and he not raising a hand in her defense.

He met Haggith on the stairs. She saw him and smiled with joy; then, noticing how pale he looked, she said:

“Why so sad, oh, man of war? Thou shouldst be glad to fight for Israel.”

He felt so crushed he had no answer ready. How could he make her understand that it was God’s will that he should not fight, she would only think him a coward and afraid; so he bowed his head and passed on.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JEREMIAH'S SUFFERINGS.

ONE day, before a single dart or stone was thrown, Asaph, who was watching from the highest point of the Temple, beheld a strange sight.

Suddenly the trumpets of the enemy were sounded, not for an attack, but for a retreat.

Column after column of fighting men in glittering array turned their backs on Jerusalem, and marched to the south-west; then followed horses and men dragging their great battering-rams and immense engines for throwing darts and stones. All day long they marched away, till not an enemy remained near the walls.

The watchmen in the towers again gave the welcome call:

“The second watch, and all's well!”

And the people were wild with delight.

Soon carriers came as fast as horse could carry them with the glad tidings that Waphris had left his kingdom with an immense army, and was now in Judah, coming to their assistance.

Then every man took his servant, being a Hebrew, that he had set at liberty, and made them serve as of old.

Then Jeremiah denounced them severely for breaking a covenant that they had sacredly made in the house of God to propitiate Him by cutting a calf in two and, passing be-

tween the parts thereof, vowing to liberate their slaves, being of their own people, as was the law to do each seventh year. So Jeremiah said they would be given into the hands of their enemies, and their bodies would become meat for the fowls of the air, and that the king and princes would be taken captive to Babylon, and the city burned with fire, and Judah be left desolate.

* * * * *

The people's disobedience and infatuated belief in the false prophets, and in the sure help of Egypt, had wearied Jeremiah, so that when the Babylonians had departed to join fight with the advancing Egyptian army, he determined to leave Jerusalem and go into the land of Benjamin; but as he was about to depart and had got so far as the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward halted him, saying:

“Thouallest away to the Chaldeans.”

But Jeremiah replied fearlessly:

“It is false! I fall not away to the Chaldeans.”

But the captain did not believe him, but took him to the princes, who smote him and put him in prison.

But he did not remain there long, for the king was not so hardened or cruel as his brother Jehoiakim, and really did try and believe in the true God; so he sent for him secretly to come to the palace, then he asked him what was the will of God.

Jeremiah reiterated what he had said so many times before about the destruction of the city, and also asked what he had done to be imprisoned, and begged not to be sent back again lest he should die there, being in a dungeon

and ill-treated. So the king ordered him to be put in the court of the prison, and that good, wholesome bread should be given him each day from the bakers' street as long as there was any bread in the city.

When Asaph learned that his friend was imprisoned, he came each day to see and talk with him through the bars, and passed in little dainties for him to eat; for as the king was not against him, he was not guarded so strictly as the other prisoners were.

But the princes wanted him to be put to death for his seditious language, saying that he discouraged and weakened both the soldiers and the people. The king, though not wishing evil to Jeremiah, was criminally weak, and told the princes to do what they desired with him; so they put him into a dungeon that was full of mire, letting him down by cords, bruising and lacerating his flesh, till his feet touched the soft mud; but it was not firm enough to bear his weight; so he sunk deeper and deeper, suffering intense tortures of suspense, till the mire reached his neck, and for awhile he sunk no further.

Asaph was horrified at the sufferings of his friend, so hastened and told one of the king's servants, an Ethiopian, brother to Cleo, with whom he had become acquainted during his secret visits to the palace, and he, fearing God and honoring His prophet, also loving Asaph, took the fastest mule in the king's stable and hastened to the gate of Benjamin, where the king was sitting hearing the petitions of his people.

Prostrating himself before Zedekiah, he said.

“My lord, the king, these men have done evil in all

they have done to Jeremiah the Prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die of hunger in the place, for there is no more bread in the city.”*

Then the king commanded that he should take thirty men and raise Jeremiah out of the mire before he died. So Eben-Melech hastened back to the palace. Asaph was waiting for him; so he told him the good news and directed him what to do to help his friend.

There was an unused apartment under the treasury, belonging to the king, containing a lot of miscellaneous articles. There Asaph and Eben obtained ropes and old rags, some of them so old and damp that they were rotten; these they took to the mouth of the pit and lowered to Jeremiah, telling him to put them between the ropes and his body. Then the men whom Eben had brought raised him up from the mire.

Asaph embraced him with a cry of joy, then scraped the mud from his clothes, and washed him, and Eben brought him fresh garments and he was then put in the court of the prison and treated with unusual kindness.

The people were sorry for Jeremiah, for many had become believers in his prophesies, and were turning again to the God of their fathers; but the ceasing of his terrible denunciations soon made them forgetful, and they became light-hearted and happy once more.

* Jeremiah, xxxviii Chapter, 9 verse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM.

It was a glorious day in Jerusalem; the sun shone with unusual splendor, but the air was cool and pleasant, and the people were about to send for fresh supplies of food, thinking all danger past, and that their allies had been victorious and had driven the ambitious Nebuchadnezzar back into his own kingdom. But before the sun was in the zenith some Hebrews from the plain country came as fast as their exhausted horses could carry them with the tidings that Waphris, seeing the immense army of the Chaldeans, had not dared to expose his smaller forces in a battle, so had retired into his own kingdom without even attempting to fight. Thus had failed the help from Egypt.

This is what the prophet had told the king and people again and again.

Even when the king had brought Jeremiah into the third entrance to the Temple and had asked him to tell him truly what would come to pass without fear, as he would not allow harm to happen to him, he had besought him to obey the voice of the Lord and deliver himself up to the Babylonians and save the city from being burned with fire, for if he did not he would certainly be taken, and all his wives and children; but the king was afraid of treachery, so chose rather to defend Jerusalem to the uttermost.

Suddenly the watchers from the towers cried out: "The foe! the foe! they come! they come! Make ready to defend the gates!"

The trumpeters blew loud and long; the men of war put on their armor and equipped themselves in haste; the slingers took their places by their engines, and the bowmen mounted the high walls. The captains of thousands gave their commands to the captains of hundreds, who again repeated them to the captains of fifties.

Zedekiah in his chariot rode from street to street, and from gate to gate, to see that no spot was left unprotected. The people were ready and willing to defend their loved city to the bitter end, even with their lives.

What could Asaph do? Oh, that Jehovah would make his duty easier; he must hide like a coward; and should the king discover him his life would pay the penalty.

"Oh, God! oh, God!" he prayed, "how hard it is to obey Thy law! Why must a man's seeming duty conflict with his obedience to Thy wishes?"

But Jehovah's words came not to him as to Jeremiah. Even now the God of Israel was gradually withdrawing himself from an outward manifestation to his chosen people; no more the jewels of the breastplate blazed with light, thus answering by Urim and Thummim the questions of priest and king; no more the oracle in the Holy of Holies gave forth the words of the Most High; no new prophets of the Lord were arising from among the people. They were soon to depend on the laws that God had already given them, and in the working of their consciences for deciding between right and wrong.

While Asaph wept and prayed, the whole valley was flooded with their enemies, Chaldeans, their allies the Medes, and all their ancient enemies of the Land of Promise.

Jeremiah still thundered from the bars of his prison in the court for the king and people to give themselves up or die by slaughter, pestilence, and famine.

The heavy blows of the battering-rams sounded on the gates; but the men of Judah quickly concentrated on the walls, and with slings and arrows caused them to withdraw and fight from their high towers, which they had built even to the height of the walls. On these the picked men of the Chaldeans, who could draw the bow to kill each time, assembled in great numbers, and though they were opposed by men equally as brave and skillful, many too who could use both hands with equal dexterity, yet many fell from the walls dead, with no time left to the living to bury them or even to lament with them with burning spices and "Oh, Lords." Others immediately filled the places of the dead and wounded, and thus the fighting went on day and night.

The streets were constantly filled with men and women picking up darts and stones, and bringing water to the wounded.

Even the house-tops held their contingent; all busy preparing weapons, garments, food for those who fought.

Their energy never seemed to flag nor their courage to waver.

One day, without any warning, great stones suddenly fell into the streets, crushing men women and children

beneath them; the people fled terror-stricken, but soon recovered themselves, and several together carried the stones to their own engines of war that were being constructed to oppose those of the enemy; so soon these same stones were hurled back and forth, doing havoc on both sides of the wall.

Poor Asaph! Even his mother pitied him; for to obey God implicitly he must not even pick up a stone or make an arrow; he could only look on and see his loved people shot down or crushed to death without doing anything to help them. Now he felt sympathy for the king, knowing how very hard it must be for him to see his duty clear and to perform it.

Ah, but one thing he could do—minister to the wounded and dying; so he hastened where the fighting was fiercest, and unheeding stones or javelins or darts, when one fell wounded he was by his side, giving him wine and water, which he carried in a leather bottle, or binding up his wounds, and did what he could to comfort them. How he thanked God for permitting him to do even this.

Now Helah was busy each day weaving bandages and making cordials and ointments for the sick and wounded.

The princess—little Elia no longer, but a tall beautiful maiden—often came upon the streets disguised, and helped Asaph in his work of love.

Thus many months passed away, still the valleys seemed as full of men as at first; but the defenders of Jerusalem were gradually diminishing in numbers. Then they thought of new engines of war, or greater ones than they had been using, and went to work with renewed energy to

construct them. But food was getting scarce in the city, and many white, pinched faces told of want of proper nourishment. Oh, if they could only hold the city long enough to tire out the haughty Nebuchadnezzar! But he had already gone to Riblah to direct from there the sieges of both Tyre and Jerusalem; and his soldiers seemed legions—never diminishing, but ever increasing legions!

The warm weather came at last, and the heat of the sun on the dead bodies caused a dreadful stench to arise and filled the air with poison, and then came the pestilence.

All that Jeremiah had prophesied was coming true.

Now the soldiers' rations were shortened, and soon they became weakened from not having sufficient food, and the strings of the bows had to be loosened—they could not draw as strongly as of old nor aim so sure.

Asaph observed this with sorrow at his heart. Must they all die of gradual starvation—his mother, the princess, the poor king, and his friends Jeremiah and Shalmi?

Half the nights Asaph spent in prayer in the Temple, asking for guidance.

“Only put it in my thoughts, thou God of infinite compassion, what Thy willing servant shall do to alleviate the sufferings of Thy chosen people. Oh, forget not thy promise to our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their seed shall be as the stars of the sky or the sands of the sea. Oh, blot us not out from the face of the earth. Have pity, have pity, oh, Thou merciful One!”

So night after night he prayed; but in the day he fearlessly did what he could for those who suffered.

One night, when he had returned home to rest, his mother said:

“Asaph, our food is almost gone, and there is naught to buy save what thou wouldst not eat.”

“My mother, give me but a crust to keep life in my body, and do thou eat the rest.”

“And when that is gone? We can not do as the poor—eat unclean things.”

“It tears my heart to see our people suffer so. Nightly I pray for light to help them; but all is darkness. Jehovah seems to have hidden His face from His offending children.”

Each day the famine and pestilence increased, and each day the fighting men of Judah were decimated in numbers. At last the ghastly white pinched faces became horrible to see. Elia's face had also lost its bloom. Asaph, too, was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger, when one night he arose from his knees in the Temple with his face illuminated. He quickly hastened to the palace, and giving a signal, Eben opened a secret gate.

“Peace be with thee,” Asaph said. “Is food also scarce at the palace?”

“While there is aught in the city the king and royal household must be fed; but the food is coarse and harsh for gentle stomachs. An occasional ass's head and dove's dung for salt is the food that must content our poor slaves. Ugh!” said Eben.

“Jehovah in His pity hath put it in my heart how to help at least a portion of His poor forsaken people. I am going into the valley. Fear not for me, only tell those on

the wall near the great tree not to mistake me for an enemy, and I will bring them food.”

Eben ascended the walls with him, and so informed the guards.

Asaph, lowering himself somewhat by the vines, sprung into the tree and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXV.

ASAPH OBTAINS FOOD FOR THE STARVING.

WHEN Asaph reached the ground he crawled along on his hands and knees, for the valley was full of tents and armed men, but now many of these were asleep, to be invigorated for the morrow, as Nebuchadnezzar did not wish to wear out his soldiers by too excessive duty, knowing that Jerusalem must be taken sooner or later, so it was only a question of time.

A sentinel called "Halt!" on hearing the noise of his movements, but Asaph gave the cry of that dreaded animal the lion, and as the night was very dark, the sentinel retreated a step or two, not wishing such an encounter.

Asaph passed on.

Thus at every halt he gave the cry of some wild beast—tiger, leopard, wolf—and as the soldiers thought these animals were attracted by the scent of blood, they gave them room. So Asaph reached his cave in safety.

He felt his way in, speaking softly, and calling the names of his goats. Many times during all these years he had visited them, and they had not forgotten him, but came and rubbed themselves against his hands and knees.

He drew his knife; then his heart felt sick with pity. Should he kill these poor dumb creatures who so trusted him? No, he could not do it.

He felt his way carefully into the inner cave, found his

flints and kindled a fire; then he lighted the lamp, for everything was just as they had left it. He brushed the dust from a large basin and took it, together with the churn and lamp into the cave beyond, and calling his goats to him, he milked them; then he drank of the generous fluid—how delicious it tasted! He filled the leather churn with the life-giving liquor, and tied its mouth securely. Then extinguishing the lamp he went into the outer cave and left the churn and a basin of milk in the entrance. He then went into the thicket and looked about; seeing some kids that were wild, he drew his bow and shot one with a true aim, so that it did not suffer, then he shot a second, and binding them upon his back, together with the churn, he drained the basin of milk, and, feeling stronger, he began the homeward journey. But it was a very difficult task, especially in his weakened state. There were many tombs in the valley, and the superstitious Chaldeans, catching sight of his strange figure, thought it was the spirit of some monster—for they believed in the occult more than any other nation—and so they would shrink away as he passed. This fear, together with his wild beast cries, cleared his path, so at last he reached the king's garden; but he was nearly exhausted. After resting awhile he climbed the tree, but very slowly; then he gave the signal very softly. In a moment Eban appeared on the wall.

“Throw me a rope,” Asaph said in a whisper.

This caused a delay of some time; but Asaph rested in the tree, so recovered a little from his fatigue.

Eben threw the rope with good aim, and Asaph caught

it. Tying a kid firmly to one end, he told Eben to draw it up, then lower it again; then he sent up the second kid, then the milk.

“Disturb them not till I come,” he called, springing into the vines.

He was soon by Eben’s side; and taking the little cup from his bosom—which he always carried now—he gave him a draught of milk.

“Ah! that is good!” cried the Ethiopian. “Asaph, thou art wise above the children of backsliding Israel!”

“Nay, ’tis but the experience of my childhood serving me in time of need, so that I can comfort those who love me. Man of war, refresh thyself,” he said to the sentry, giving him a cup of milk.

The sentry smacked his lips, and told him to come again; several soldiers came near, to each of them Asaph gave a portion, then he and Eben descended the wall. Then Asaph said:

“Eben, divide this kid; give of the best portions to the Princess Elia—she will send some to the king, her uncle—then take the rest for thyself and friends; take of the milk also, and let me begone, for my mother is also in need.”

Soon Asaph was at his home with the kid and milk hidden under a large mantle loaned by the Ethiopian.

Helah’s eyes sparkled at the sight of the welcome food. She had not retaken her liberated slaves, so there were none besides themselves and an old Hebrew woman who had belonged to Helah’s father; she had had her ear pierced with the awl, and was thus a willing slave forever.

Soon old Marth was up and dressing the flesh of the kid; how she laughed with joy at the sight!

“ Every night, my mother, I shall go and get thee food and for our friends, and for those who need it most that my efforts can supply.”

They soon sat down to a meal the like of which they had not tasted for many days.

“ Now for a few hours’ rest; then before the sun is up I will take a portion of the kid and a bottle of milk to good Shalmal; and, mother, have a piece nicely cooked on my return for poor imprisoned Jeremiah.”

For several hours Asaph slept the sleep of utter exhaustion; but Helah and old Marth were busy and happy preparing the food.

In seasons of great calamity the comfort of the present moment seems the great desideratum; so it was in Jerusalem. Old Marth chatted and laughed, and fairly caressed the food.

“ Mistress, send not too much away—old Marth gets hungry.” Then she slyly hid a small portion and a little milk. “ Ha, ha, ha!” she laughed, “ old Marth knows.”

Asaph entered the chamber refreshed and strengthened by his sleep and food.

“ Give me the shoulder joint, my mother, and a bottle of milk.”

Receiving them he left his home while it was yet dark, so that the hungry wretches on the streets should not tear the food from him in their frenzy.

Arriving at Shalmal’s house he knocked at the door;

but all was silent. He knocked again louder than before. At length a voice came from a distance asking:

“Who is there?”

Asaph’s heart smote him for not bringing help before; but he had naught to bring till Jehovah had put this good thought into his mind. Suppose old Sara should be dead, or the beautiful Adah!

“It is I—Asaph!”

In a moment a light was kindled, and the bar taken from the door.

Asaph started back with horror at the white, haggard face that greeted him; then he said:

“Peace be upon this house,” and entered. “How is the good Sara, and thy fair daughter?”

“The hand of the Lord is heavy upon us. They but live—all our food is gone. Since two days we have only tasted water and a little oil, and for many days before a little fruit and herbs was all our food.”

They passed into the room where Sara lay.

“Ah, good master, hast thou come to see us before we die,” she said, in a broken voice.

Then Adah came in like a beautiful spirit.

“I have brought you a little food, my friends, and, as long as Jehovah permits it, will do so each day.”

Then he uncovered the flesh and set out the milk.

“Oh! Jehovah’s name be praised! and be thou blessed, my son, who hath not forgotten thy poor friends in their calamity!”

Sara raised herself up in bed.

“Ah! the food—the good food!” she cried, and her eyes glistened.

Adah said not a word, but quickly kindled a fire, and soon the smell of the roast kid was a sweet savor to this poor, famished family. Asaph poured some milk and carried it to Sara.

Then they passed into the room where Adah had the table spread. Soon all was ready, and Sara joined them. The roast was smoking hot; that and the milk was all, but to them it was a delicious feast.

Shalmal asked a blessing, and then said:

“Gently, gently, Sara, and thou, too, Adah, thou art weak; eat slowly, and not too much;” and he set the example.

Asaph was pressed to join them; at last he did so, but eating scarcely a morsel, not to deprive them of the precious food.

Then he told them how the thought had come to him, when they, too, were suffering from hunger, and how he had made his midnight journey to the cave and obtained so much good food.

“I will come to thee, good Asaph, for after such exertions, this long walk is asking too much even of so good a friend.”

So it was arranged that each day before the sun was up, Shalmal should come and give two soft raps upon the door, and then receive what Asaph had for them.

“Now I must go. Farewell, and peace be upon you all!”

Shalmai blessed him, and Sara and Adah made obeisance to the ground.

Asaph hastened home. There everything was ready, so he was soon giving pleasure to his friend Jeremiah with the nicely cooked morsels.

“Surely Jehovah put it in my thoughts, thinkst thou not so, my friend?” he asked him when he had told him all.

“Ay, my son, our God is a God of tender mercy. I am glad thou hast found employment to satisfy the feelings of thy gentle heart. But, oh! if the king would only obey the Lord all this misery might be spared our people. Nebuchadnezzar would be a father to them and harm them not; but now, oh, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! must I see thy strong walls leveled to the ground, thy houses and palaces become heaps, the dwelling-place of bats and owls, thy fair pools the habitation of the bittern and the stork?”

“Is there no hope, good Jeremiah, that Jehovah will repent and lift His heavy hand that He has laid so hard upon His children?”

“Ay, did they but obey. But soon the time of obedience will be past, and nothing can then avert the destruction of Jerusalem!”

For awhile Asaph was silent and sad, then he said:

“Shall I bring thee food to-morrow, my father?”

“The food is scarce in the city? Has the famine commenced?”

“Ay, and the pestilence, too. Hast thou not noticed the haggard faces around?”

“ I thought perhaps my eyes deceived me. Now could I weep rivers of water for my poor people!”

Asaph turned away, and said:

“ I will come again to-morrow. Farewell.”

“ Peace be with thee!” cried Jeremiah, and Asaph was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ASAPH BRINGS COMFORT TO MANY.—HAGGITH IS STARVING.

THE sun was pouring down its fierce rays upon the devoted city. The effluvia arising from the unburied dead was something terrible. The sanitary condition of Jerusalem had long been neglected. Asaph thought what must be the condition of the houses of the poor, when even a building belonging to the king, in a good quarter of the city, was allowed to contain rotten rags and cast-off cloths. The streets had not been cleaned for months, and each one threw his filth and garbage into the street before his door. No wonder pestilence went hand in hand with famine!

Every now and then came loud shouts from the walls at a particularly good shot by sling or bow.

As he passed one of the towers where the fighting seemed the fiercest, he paused a moment and looked up. Suddenly a whistling sound, a cry of pain, and a body came flying through the air. Involuntarily he stretched his mantle out wide; the man struck it in his descent, and they both fell to the earth together. For a moment Asaph was stunned, but he soon regained consciousness, and not thinking of his own bruises, he turned to the wounded man. An arrow had pierced the fleshy part of his thigh. To withdraw it, Asaph had to break off the feathered end,

and draw the pointed portion, which already projected, through the wound. The blood gushed out, and the man groaned with pain. Quickly taking a bandage from his bosom, he moistened it with wine and water from his bottle, and when the wound had bled sufficiently to free it from deleterious matter, he bound it quickly with a dexterous hand; then placing a cup of the fluid to the soldier's mouth, said:

“Drink, my brother.”

The man did so, then opened his eyes.

“Ah, thou hast rescued me from death!”

“Shall I help thee to thy house?”

“Ay; 'tis not far.”

He leaned heavily on Asaph's shoulder, and thus they walked with a slow pace till they came to his door.

His wife and children lamented loudly when they saw him in this sad plight, for beside sorrow at his suffering it meant loss of food to them; for he always carried home part of his rations, and the soldiers were supplied as long as there was food in the city.

Asaph bade them be of good cheer, and said:

“Jehovah will provide.”

But they laughed sadly.

“If the kind God of our fathers puts it into my heart to bring you food, will He not then provide it?”

“But wilt thou? How canst thou obtain it? See the babe there famishing for want of a little milk—”

“I will bring thee some. Now fetch a basin.”

They did so, and he poured into it some wine and water.

“Dampen the bandage with it ever and anon, and give him a small portion to drink to keep up his strength.”

They looked at him with awe, but the wife said:

“Art thou the king?”

Asaph smiled.

“Nay, I am only thy brother, who trusts in God;” and he hastened away.

All day long some poor wounded man blessed the ministering of Asaph’s tender hands. Then, as the sun set in a blaze of glory, and the arrows and stones fell in diminished quantities, he went to his own home.

A savory meal awaited him, and while they eat his mother asked him of all his doings of the day.

He always conversed with her unreservedly, and kept her well informed of the state of the siege.

Old Marth was ever smiling; she had food, she was happy; so the animal in earth’s children betrays itself.

“Hast a little milk remaining, my mother? A wounded brother, whom I helped to-day, hath a babe who is famishing for lack of it.”

“Poor thing! Here is a little bottle full.”

Marth’s face lengthened.

“Is master going again to-night to get the pretty food?”

“Ay, Marth; thou shalt not starve if I can prevent it. Now I will sleep awhile.”

A new life seemed to be introduced into the house with the advent of food. Old Marth was ever busy preparing food or polishing pots and pans, and Helah worked with

renewed energy, preparing things that Asaph needed in his ministrations to the wounded.

When it was time to go on his excursion for food, Helah placed her hand upon his forehead, and he arose immediately.

“ I feel refreshed, my mother. Give me the bottle of milk, and I will be gone.”

Helah gave it to him, and kissed him on the cheek.

“ Be careful, my loved son.”

“ Ay, trust me.”

He stopped on his way to leave the milk for the soldier's babe, but without waiting for their thanks, he hurried on.

Soon he was at the secret gate of the king's palace. At the signal Eben admitted him. In a moment Cleo prostrated herself before him.

“ Cleo thanks master for the flesh. Cleo is his slave!”

Speaking a kind word to her, he hastily ascended the wall.

The sentry greeted him with pleasure, remembering the draught of milk.

“ Eben, have the ropes ready when I give the signal of the night-owl's cry,” said Asaph; then he disappeared over the wall.

Cautiously he picked his way as the night before, and at length found himself at the cave. Again he milked the goats, and again two kids were bound upon his back. He did not dare overburden himself, lest his strength should fail or he should be discovered. When he was safely over the walls again, he divided the provender, one half to the palace and one half to himself. Cleo was there with bottles ready for the milk.

Asaph did not forget the sentinel, and also said:

“ Eben, give him a small portion of flesh for me, for I dare not tarry.”

Cleo followed him.

“ Can Cleo do aught for the master?”

“ Take good care of thy mistress, the fair princess. See that she wants for naught. Should she need my help, knowest thou where I live?”

“ Ay, good master. Many nights has Cleo passed in shadow of thy house. No ill come to Cleo when master near!”

Asaph looked horrified.

“ What? Nay, do not so, but trust in the Holy One of Israel. He will protect thee.”

“ Cleo trust master. Cleo no love God!”

“ Cleo,” he said, softly, “ wouldst thou please me?”

“ Ay, master, with Cleo’s life!”

“ Then learn from thy good mistress how to serve the great Jehovah, and be kind to the poor.”

He then quickly went his way, and soon was at his home. Marth opened the door.

“ Much food this time, master? In the market to-day they were selling asses’ heads. Ay, old Marth would go much hungry before she would seethe one in her pot!”

She took the kid into the kitchen and dressed it, saving each portion carefully, then she secreted a piece and laughed slyly. All this while Helah slept, and soon Asaph retired also.

* * * * *

Before the sun was up a soft knock sounded upon the

door. Old Marth opened it slightly and stealthily peered out. A gentle voice said:

“The master bade me come for food.”

“Ay, ay, indeed! We keep not the market.”

“I am his friend, and came to save his gentle kindness from a tedious walk.”

“Marth knows thee not.”

And she partly closed the door.

The noise awoke Asaph, and he came quickly.

“Is it thou, Shalmai?”

“Ay, my master; but thy servant did not believe my words.”

“Enter, my friend.”

The old man removed his shoes and left them at the door, then followed Asaph.

“Bring food for my guest, good Marth.”

The old slave turned pale with anger, and shook her fist and muttered:

“These hungry sons of Benjamin will eat all the food and let us starve!”

But Asaph turned and said:

“Marth, I will bring more to-morrow.”

But with her what was now in their possession was sure and better than the uncertainty of to-morrow. But she had to obey. She placed one plate upon the table.

“Two, good Marth,” said Asaph. “Now bring some nice cold roast and milk.” He helped Shalmai to a generous portion, who then asked a blessing. How he enjoyed the food! “Marth, cut from the kid a leg for Shalmai, and fill the bottle he has brought with milk.”

Marth stood still with folded arms; but Asaph looked at her, and she, grumbling, left the room. He followed her to see that his orders were obeyed; then she said:

“Oh, master, master, thy heart is too good for this stiff-necked people! Give him but a little piece.”

“Marth, he was good to thy mistress and myself when we both needed friends. Shall we not repay his kindness, even to a hundred-fold? The *whole* leg, Marth—and the bottle—full.”

She obeyed, but her hands shook with anger.

Soon Shalmai went on his way rejoicing; but Marth grumbled and fretted so that she awoke Helah, who arose. Then Asaph, kissing her on the cheek, took a portion of the roast under his mantle and a bottle of milk, and went out.

Soon he was knocking at the door of the soldier's house. His entrance was greeted with joy. The babe was in its mother's arms.

“See, master, is she not bright? She would have died but for thee,” said the happy mother. And when he laid the roast and milk upon the table they all fell prostrate before him; but he said:

“Give thanks only to the Most High, the giver of all good gifts to man.”

Then he taught them a short prayer, after which he hastened away to minister to the wounded and dying, first carrying some food to Jeremiah.

To walk through the streets now was terrible—especially near the walls, where the dead lay thickest.

How could any one survive the fearful stench and the

terrible pestilence? The hollow, sunken eyes, the livid cheeks, the trembling limbs! Were these the once gloriously handsome men of Judah? Where now is all thy comeliness, oh, men of war!

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, where now is the beauty of thy daughters and the comeliness of thy matrons? How Asaph's heart ached at the sight of the women as they staggered from their doors to see if they could pick up aught in the street to satisfy their hunger.

Toward evening he noticed a figure watching the evil birds hovering over the dead. As he came near he recognized Haggith, but so changed she seemed like a wicked witch as she stretched out her long bony fingers and tried to seize one of the unclean things; but it would ever elude her grasp, hover for a moment above its prey, then dart down suddenly to its unholy feast.

Asaph looked on in horror. What was she about to do? Just then a stray arrow pierced it in its flight, and it fell dying at Haggith's feet. She grasped it in her bony hands, and with a cry of joy she tore it with her teeth.

"Haggith!" he cried, sick with horror, "what dost thou?"

"I—I am starving," she said.

"Nay; do not this thing, oh, Levite's daughter; eat not the unclean thing—and with the blood! Oh, it is too horrible!"

"I—I am starving," was all she said.

"Stay but a little. I will send thee food—some flesh of kid and milk, and some for thy father; but do not eat the unclean bird."

The thought of the promised food somewhat calmed her.

“ I—I will wait,” she said

Asaph hastened away. After walking some distance he met Cleo.

“ Cleo, wilt do a message for me?”

“ Ay, good master,” she said, with a glad look.

“ Then follow me to my house.”

When he had reached it he bade her enter, then giving her a piece of roast kid and a bottle of milk, he said:

“ Take these to the Levite’s daughter who once sold flowers in the market. She is starving by the western wall; haste, and tell no one what thou dost. Hide it under thy mantle.”

“ Cleo—Cleo like her not, oh, master!” she said, sullenly.

“ Do it as the will of our kind God, Cleo, so that He may not forget thee when thy trouble comes.”

She took it without another word and passed quickly from his sight. Then she looked around.

“ Cleo not take it to eat woman. Cleo hate her. Cleo eat it when she hungry.”

So, smiling, she passed the western wall where Haggith was waiting. She stood and watched her.

As the minutes passed and Asaph did not come, she wistfully eyed the bleeding bird. As the time lengthened she stretched out her hands and touched it, then looked around stealthily, then took it in her hand; then with a cry she tore it ravenously and smacked her lips with fierce pleasure.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Cleo, sarcastically. “Levite girl eat bad bird. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Ay, taunt on, thou fat slave of a wanton!” she cried. “I sell not my body for food!”

“Levite girl is fool! Cleo’s mistress lives in palace.” And she walked away indignantly.

* * * * *

From the highest parts of the city the valley seemed still as full as ever of the glittering enemy, well fed and confident of victory. The towers they had built in so many places around the walls had been the means of great destruction to the people of Jerusalem. As the number of men on the walls diminished the enemy grew bolder, and again the battering-rams pounded on the gates; but the very sound put renewed life into the hearts of the Israelites, and they quickly gathered at these points, and many a Chaldean fell dead for his temerity.

The streets were now in such a bad condition that the princess was forced to confine her visits to those furthest from the walls; but she did not neglect her devotions at the holy Temple, so Asaph saw and conversed with her each day.

Things became worse and worse; but Jerusalem would not surrender. Some of the women would have been too glad to see the Babylonians enter the gates and carry them away—that meant food and health and a chance to live. They remembered when Jehoiakim had been taken captive how the women had been put in carts and not separated from their children. The Chaldeans were handsome and kind; they did not fear them.

Cleo had been gradually learning, from listening to Asaph in the Temple, to know the true God, and she began to love and fear Him.

One day, while passing along the street, she noticed a figure huddled up in a corner. She approached—it was Haggith gnawing one of her arms, which was bitten and bloody. Cleo started at the ghastly sight, and her conscience smote her; so she said:

“Levite’s daughter, forgive Cleo. Cleo was wicked. Glorious master sent her food days ago. Cleo eat it—forgive.”

“I—I—have—food. See!” and she held out her bleeding arm.

“Cleo sorry. Cleo come again.”

She hastened away and sought Asaph. When she found him she cried:

“Oh, master, Cleo so wicked. Levite’s daughter dying—eating herself. Ugh! Cleo no gave food. Come quick!”

“Where is she?” he asked.

“Near Sheep Gate. Come!”

But Asaph took a tablet from his bosom and wrote a message to his mother.

“Take this to my house, Cleo, and bring what they give thee to where thou sawest the Levite’s daughter. I will hasten to her.” So saying, he hurried away.

What a terrible sight met his eyes—the daughter of one of the former servants of God eating her own flesh for food!

“Haggith,” he said, gently; but she gazed at him with

the look of a wild animal. “Haggith, drink a little from this cup; there—now let me bind thy arm; thou shalt have food in a little while.”

“So thou saidst before. Ha, ha, ha!”

She laughed. It was ghastly.

“But I sent it, Haggith. Cleo has repented her wickedness. Now drink a little more.”

“It—it—gives life!”

Then he bound her wounded arm and said:

“Thy father—is he with the fighting men?”

“He—is—at home—starving, but hugging his gold; but he can not eat it. Ha, ha, ha!”

Just then Cleo came in sight.

“Cheer up, Haggith, food cometh. Jehovah hath sent it to thee.”

Cleo gave the flesh to him slyly so that none could see. He took a morsel in his fingers.

“Eat this then if thou canst. Show us thy house.”

She eat it ravenously.

“More! more!” she cried.

“Yes, when we reach thy father’s house. Come.”

She arose to her feet, but almost fell.

“Lean on me; I will help thee,” he said. Then Cleo took her arm on the other side, and together they led her home to a miserable hovel very forlorn and wretched. They entered. The Levite was in a corner chattering to himself and hugging some bags of gold. He was just verging on insanity from starvation. They placed Haggith on a seat, and Cleo went to the shelf and brought platters and bowls and put them on the broken table.

“Levite, the God of Israel hath sent thee food—eat!” said Asaph.

“Food! food! but thou canst not have my gold!” he cried.

“Nay. Jehovah wants not thy money—eat!”

He poured some milk for each, and while he attended to the Levite, Cleo ministered to Haggith. After they had eaten a small portion Asaph said:

“No more now, or thou wilt die. Rest a little, then eat again.”

“How good thou art! But even as a boy thy heart was kind,” said Haggith.

“Is—is—this the Moloch boy?” cried Zaccur. “I—I thank thee, master!”

“Levite, thank thy God, not me. If thou wilt come each morning before the sun is up to my house, thou shalt have food for thyself and daughter. Cleo, stay awhile and see that they eat sparingly.” Then he hastened away until their thanks.

Each night Asaph brought food, and each day many blessed his name, and turned to the true God through his gentle influence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JERUSALEM IS TAKEN AND THE KING ESCAPES.

THE siege continued, and month after month passed away with ever-increasing horrors; still Jerusalem would not surrender. At last affairs became so desperate that parents, crazed with want of food, eat their own children, and—!

Again the battering-rams thundered at the gates; but now no fighting men gathered quickly to shoot the besiegers down. Only a few were on the walls, and they so haggard that even the enemy were touched with pity.

One night, as Asaph was returning home from his nightly forage for food, he heard the battering-rams pounding viciously at a certain gate near the Temple; he hastened to his house, and depositing the food, said:

“My mother, I fear for Jerusalem to-night. Should aught befall the city and I not be here, disguise thyself and seek Shalmal’s house, and abide with him—the poor will fare best with the conquering Chaldeans. Take Marth with thee. Now I will go and see what the tidings are.”

He hastened to the besieged gate. The noise of the blows was terrific. Crash! crash!—then wild shouts from without. But the streets were deserted; the poor starved Israelites slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. Bang! bang! crash!—then again the shouts of the besiegers.

Asaph listened intently.

Crash! bang!—then a slight crackling sound, as if a portion of the wood had given way.

Asaph's heart beat fast.

Again the terrific pounding of the ram, again the crash and breaking timbers, again the shouts from the triumphant foe.

Pound! pound! Crash!—and the end of the immense beam of the battering-ram pierced through the timbers, and came in sight to the watching Asaph.

“Oh, God of Israel! have mercy, have mercy! Oh, pity Thy children!”

But the aperture became larger and larger, and—crash! the gate fell from its hinges and the army poured in.

“Sh!—silently!” was the command, and the princes and generals made all haste to be the first to enter the holy Temple. These superstitious people had been eagerly waiting for eighteen months to see the grand mysteries therein contained—mysteries so deep and subtle that had so long helped the chosen people and spread terror among their enemies.

Immediately Asaph sped along the streets, as fleet as a deer, to the palace to inform the king. He pounded on the gate.

“Open, open, quickly!” he cried. “I have great tidings for the king! Quick, quick! before it is too late!”

Eben was hastily summoned, and questioning Asaph, accompanied him to the king.

“Oh, my lord the king, thine enemies have entered into the holy places of the Temple! The gate by the

market-place is thrown to the ground, and the Chaldeans are pouring in!"

Eben spoke:

"Oh, beloved lord and master, fly, fly! Let not these wicked men take thy precious life! This is the Moloch boy, his word is truth!"

In a moment the palace was in the utmost confusion. Men, women, and children were running hither and thither, gathering their necessities and valuables, to take with them in their flight.

Elia came to Asaph, and said:

"What shall I do, my brother?"

"Disguise thyself. The poor will have more mercy shown them. I will hasten to my mother, then we will join the king and thee in thy flight. Trust in Jehovah, oh, princess! and in thy friend Asaph."

Then, fleet as the wind, he sped back to his mother's house; but all was dark, silent, and deserted. Then on to Shalmai's, but the streets were full of armed men, capturing old and young. But no cries of agony arose from the prisoners, there seemed rather to be a feeling of relief. So Asaph, trusting his mother to the better care of the God they both adored, hastened back to the palace; but now it too was quite deserted, and Asaph could see in the moonlight the king, his court and servants moving toward the gate by the garden, so he ran with his utmost speed—and he could outrace a horse—and joined them just as they passed into the valley.

From the Temple came cries of agony, for the Chaldeans, Medes, and Moabites, and all the other allies were

fiercely slaughtering nearly all who had taken refuge there, trusting in Jehovah and the sanctity of the place, but the Chaldeans, fearing neither the God of Israel nor revering His holy Temple, tore aside the beautiful curtains and laughed in derision at the bareness of the Holy of Holies.

“Where is this people’s God?” they cried, while those who had surrendered looked on in horror, expecting some terrible manifestations of Jehovah’s wrath against their impious invaders; but the Most High had withdrawn from His Temple, and now it was merely a building of wood and stone.

In the streets those who resisted were quickly dispatched by the sword of the enemy.

Shalmai came to his door with all his family, including Helah and old Marth, and they prostrated themselves to the earth.

“Ah! that is as it should be,” said the Chaldean captain, to whom they had made obeisance, and who was not an unusually cruel man. “Put thy women in this cart. Thou art a fine specimen of a Jew, and thou lookest wise. The king might need thee in his service. Get thee in, too.”

Each had their little bundle. Helah’s contained her jewels and money. Once outside the gates, the kind captain gave them bread and bade them be of good cheer.

Two soldiers had entered the Levite’s hovel.

“Come! hasten, wretch!” the leader said.

“I—I can not leave my gold!” cried Zaccur, tremblingly.

“Come, thou Levite! Why didst thou not obey thy God, and come to us?”

“Good man of war, leave me here in peace, and I will give thee some of my lovely gold—gold! Ah! how it shines!” cried Zaccur.

“Wilt thou come?”

But he clung to the closet where he had buried his treasures.

“I—I can not leave it! Oh, good man of war, have mercy!”

“Thou starving dog! thou dost not know what is for thine own good!” cried the leader, angrily.

“Father, the good man speaks the truth. Let us go with him, and live!” spoke Haggith.

“I will not leave my gold—my beautiful gold!” he cried, frantically.

Quickly the leader drew forth a ring which was attached to a chain. It opened with one end sharpened to a point. Seizing Zaccur by the beard, he pressed the point through the soft flesh above his lip, and the Levite was a prisoner. With a cry of pain he dropped his arms by his side, his head drooped upon his breast, and he was utterly subdued.

Haggith wept, and with her veil she wiped the dripping blood from Zaccur’s face, and walked by his side supporting him.

The leader gave the chain to a subordinate, who thus led them outside the walls.

Word was brought by some deserters to the victorious generals Nergal, Sharezur, Sangar, Nebo, Rabsaris, Sar-

eschim, and Rabmag, that the king and many fighting men had escaped, and were on their way to Jericho.

Quickly the trumpets were sounded, and all the men who could be spared from guarding the captives were ordered to pursue the fugitives.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE KING IS CAPTURED AND MADE BLIND.

It was midnight, and the solemn silence of the hour was broken by the distant shouts in the furthest parts of Jerusalem and the cries of the dying from the Temple.

“Toward Jericho!” was the command, and the march was as rapid as possible under the circumstances.

The guards and fighting men who surrounded the palace were all with the king and seemed a fair protection.

They reached the desert, and hastened through the still warm sand—on, on to safety!

Jericho was near. Would not the king give them protection till Jehovah’s favor was turned again to His poor children?

Only a little further, and they could rest from this weary flight, and eat and refresh themselves.

But suddenly a noise as of distant thunder fell upon their listening ears. Nearer and nearer it came, like the deep roar as it reverberates through the riven sky—faster the fugitives fled, and faster the enemy pursued them.

Suddenly the sun burst out in all its splendor, and showed the whole plain full of men of war in their glittering armor, on horses, in chariots, on mules—anything for speed in the pursuit.

With the sight Zedekiah’s generals, friends, and soldiers

scattered in all directions, and left him deserted, save by a few princes of his house and his wives and children.

Further flight was now useless, and poor, brave Zedekiah was forced at last to submit.

He was quickly surrounded by a shouting, victorious multitude, who bore him in triumph to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, from which city he had directed both the siege of Tyre and Jerusalem. Asaph had followed secretly.

When Zedekiah was brought before the King of Babylon, he was intensely angry, and cried:

“Oh, thou wretch! thou covenant breaker! Did I not give thee a fair kingdom to keep for me, and not to make alliance with mine enemies? But God is great, and hateth that conduct of thine, and hath brought thee under us!”*

Then, at a sign, they brought Zedekiah’s sons—beautiful boys—and placing them before his eyes, the soldiers pierced them through and through with many sword-thrusts.

Zedekiah cried out in agony.

“They are sons of a false father, and shall not live to be mine enemies!” cried the mighty king.

Then the princes were also put to the sword.

Zedekiah could almost feel the cold steel at his own heart, but he was not anticipating the cruel torture in store for him.

“Thou treacherous wretch! thou shalt not see my glory, nor the beauty of Babylon the great!” said Nebuchadnezzar.

* Josephus.

At a sign from him two soldiers approached with each a small brazier of fire.

They pressed the points of their swords into the fires, then, standing before the king, they awaited the sign.

Zedekiah turned pale with horror. Nebuchadnezzar smiled a ghastly smile, and clapped his hands.

Simultaneously the soldiers plunged the red-hot swords into the staring eyes of the captive king; two little wreaths of smoke ascended, and the smell of burning human flesh filled the air. Zedekiah shrieked and fell to the earth, writhing in agony. Asaph, from his concealment, swooned with horror.

The poor, blinded king, bound in chains of brass, was led like a dumb beast captive to the great city of Babylon.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ASAPH HIDES IN THE TEMPLE CISTERNS.—JERUSALEM IS
BURNED.

WHEN Asaph recovered consciousness, the plain was deserted, save by the birds of prey that had scented blood and hovered above the bodies of the murdered princes.

With a heavy heart he turned and fled back to Jerusalem.

What a forlorn sight met his eyes! Outside the walls the ground was strewn with the leavings of the vast army, and there, fighting with the flocks of evil birds, were the poor, hungry Israelites—the remnant of the once proud tribe of Judah—searching for castaway bits of food and lees of wine.

How eagerly they pressed the empty bottles to their parched lips, and how they snatched and fought for any goodly piece of bread or bit of flesh! The love of kin was quite forgotten, and self alone predominated.

What could Asaph do? It is useless to preach to an empty stomach; this he knew from the experience of many months. He thanked Jehovah for ending the famine, for now the people that were left—those who had secreted themselves, or had been overlooked in the haste of the enemy—were free to go into the valleys, where they could hunt or seek for wild honey, or fruits, dates, figs, grapes, olives—this last was both food and flesh to them,

ror without its oil domestic life would be sorely inconvenienced.

The gardens of lentils, millet, leeks, and sweet spices, had all been devastated by the enemy, but they found much food in the deserted camp, and some were too weak to restrain themselves, and eat and gorged till they lay like dead.

Asaph hurried from the sad sight, and going into the city, he hastened to his house.

How sad and deserted it was! Where was his mother now? Was she in safety? Would he ever see her loved face again? Then he went to the house of Shalmal. The doors were wide open, so he passed into the houses of all his friends, and he noticed that the places where they kept the writings of the sacred law were vacant, then he fell to the earth and prayed.

“ Oh, Jehovah! to Thy holy name be all glory! From river to river and from sea to sea let the seed of Thy sacred law, which is thus sown among many peoples, bear rich fruit, so that the whole world shall understand Thy loving-kindness, and that they may be good to the poor. And, oh! keep my mother from all sickness and harm, and let us once more behold each other face to face! Amen and amen!”-

He arose, feeling strengthened and less dreary and forsaken. Suddenly he thought of his friend Jeremiah, and immediately proceeded to the prison, but the doors were open, and the cells empty. He passed on to the palace, but it was utterly deserted; the poor people who were left had the hereditary awe for their king and royal family,

and so had left it undisturbed. So it was still in all the glory of its wondrous beauty, the Chaldeans at the last being in too great a hurry to spoil it of its treasures or to mar its fair proportions.

He went into Elia's pavilion. He thought of the many happy hours he had spent here when a boy, and how the little princess had ever loved him from the first, and how beautiful and good she was. Should they ever meet again?

"Yes," he cried, "I will search for her to the ends of the earth!"

He touched, with a caressing hand, her little treasures, the playthings of her childhood, the dainty work-tools of her maiden hours, and the pretty ornaments that used to adorn her neck and brow, and tears of sorrow for her absence fell on the glittering toys.

He had no plans arranged for the future; that he left in Jehovah's hands. Now he would do what he could to help his poor brothers left in Jerusalem, where the people had somewhat settled down to a miserable, forlorn existence.

Asaph went daily into the wilderness and brought them food, and many looked for his coming with eagerness, and greeted him with joy. And to each he spoke of the love and kindness of their neglected God, and by his efforts turned many to Him where they found peace of heart and mind.

One day Asaph went into the Temple and unconsciously entered the uncurtained Holy of Holies. He quickly covered his eyes with his mantle and prayed for forgiveness for thus unwittingly breaking the law; but no fearful punishment came upon him for his act, and this made him

meditate. He did not yet fully realize that the old laws were passing away; the bloody sacrifices of the Temple that had polluted the ground with blood for over four hundred years were become distasteful to God, and the ground must be purified. Again and again had the Lord declared through His prophets that the burned offerings were a stench in his nostrils. He desired a purer religion: to speak no evil of any one, to live in peace, charity, and holiness. False weights and measures were an abomination in his sight, and the Israelites were reproved again and again for their covetousness and false dealing.

In the silent solitude of the Temple Asaph seemed to come very near to his loving Father, and to have a clearer, deeper insight into the Scripture and the interpretation of the law.

One day, as he was looking over his beloved city from the Temple mount, just one month lacking two days* from the time the first gate fell in Jerusalem, he noticed from the north-west a great cloud of dust. Nearer and nearer it came, and once more the glittering paraphernalia of armed men burst upon his sight, together with chariots, horses, camels, and great carts.

Was not this poor remnant of Judah to be left alive, or were they coming to devastate the city?

In a moment he was in the streets warning the people, and many fled and secreted themselves in the ruined tombs that were plentiful in the valley; but Asaph went back to the Temple, and there uttering a prayer to God,

* Authorities differ about the date.

he went into the inclosure that contained the opening to the immense cisterns beneath the Temple. After looking down some time he lowered the great bucket, then fastened the rope so that it could descend no further, then he grasped the rope firmly with both hands and feet and descended slowly, so as not to tear his flesh. At first he could distinguish nothing in the semi-darkness, then looking beneath him he could see the water shining in the shaft of light that came from the opening above.

He grasped the rope still firmer and paused in his descent. How deep was the water, and how to reach the rocky ledges that projected all around above the little sea? He thought for a moment, then gently swayed the rope till it assumed an oscillating motion whose area became larger and larger as he descended. Now he almost touched the rocks—again, but his foot slipped; this time he must accomplish it. He planted his feet firmly, but with difficulty retained the rope, which he needed for future use; he secured it by placing a heavy rock in the bucket.

His eyes soon became accustomed to the bright spot of light that radiated for a space around but left much of the immense place in utter darkness.

For awhile he forgot all else as he traversed the rocky ledges and wondered at the gigantic arches that supported the Temple foundations. What a wondrous work was here! and the water so clear and sparkling. The cistern, or rather immense cavern, was capable of containing untold quantities, so it was to this superhuman work of the wise Solomon that they owed their lives for not famishing for lack of water as well as food.

The time passed away unnoticed by Asaph till he was aroused by the shouting of many voices and the sound of heavy blows in the Temple above—the beautiful Temple that had never echoed even to the sound of hammer and saw to be thus desecrated by the destructive blows of Israel's cruel enemies!

He would ascend immediately and defend it with his life; but suddenly the thought came to him that God's word was being fulfilled that had been spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah; so he was powerless to interfere. Still he could not help suffering intense mental pain at the thought of the ruthless destruction of the magnificent holy Temple.

After many hours of anxious listening the water in the cistern changed to blood. Asaph's heart seemed to leap into his throat.

“Oh, God! oh, God! Thy Temple is on fire!” he cried, and fell on the rocks and writhed in the intensity of his grief.

How long he remained in the cistern he could not tell—whether it was hours or days. At last he became faint from hunger and exhausted by his painful emotions.

Death seemed the easiest way to end his misery; but suddenly the thought of his mother and Elia aroused him. Perhaps even now they were needing him, and watching each passing face in hopes that it would be his. He would go to them. He felt for the rope—it was gone! In his grief he had touched the bucket; it had rolled from the rock, and now hung in the center of the water. He threw a stone to try the depth. From the sound it was immeas-

urably deep. He was entombed alive! After the first shock of horror was over a sweet peace came over him, and he slept.

When he awoke he was very weak. Clouds of smoke darkened the opening above; then for a moment it would be clear and bright, then blood red with yellow flashing flames.

He groped about the dark to try and find some means of egress; but he had to feel every footstep lest he should plunge unwittingly into the deep water. How many times he went around the immense place or whether he ever skirted it once he could not tell; but the time seemed long, and he was about to give up in despair, when he suddenly came upon a flight of steps cut in a deep recess. He cautiously ascended them, his heart beating fast with excitement. At last he came to a door. He tried it, but it did not yield to his hand; then he picked up a rock and pounded it with the strength of despair. At last the lock gave way, and the door swung open. What a sight met his gaze! The Temple a smoldering mass, and the city beyond only heaps of burning ruins! The gates were still on fire, and the walls broken and destroyed, and in many places leveled to the ground.*

Away off in the valley he could see, by the light of the rising moon, great masses of people moving toward the north.

“I will go to my mother,” he said. And with a last lingering loving look toward Jerusalem, he followed after them.

* The Temple was burned four hundred and seventy years six months and ten days after it was built.

CHAPTER XXX.

BABYLON.

FOOTSORE and weary Asaph kept on the fearful march, resting when the army rested, and living on the crumbs of food left in their path. Sometimes he found wild honey, and sometimes shot and cooked a clean bird.

When he came to a well or stream he never neglected to purify himself and perform his devotions; so when at last they arrived at the great city his beauty was scarcely marred save the rounded contour of his graceful limbs was just a little shrunk from their fair proportions.

He entered with the stragglers, and when the watchman at the gate saw him he wondered at his beauty and spoke to the captain.

“Thou hast brought a young god in beauty among thy captives. The king will thank thee for such a present.”

The captain looked.

“Why, I saw him not before. Didst thou come with us?” he said.

“Ay, but voluntarily,” Asaph answered.

“Art thou not a captive, and an Israelite?”

“An Israelite, ay, but a captive, no. See, I have no chains.”

“Why didst thou come, then?” the captain asked, astonished.

“I would serve Nebuchadnezzar and live in Babylon; my mother and my friends are here as captives.”

The captain, Nebuzar-adan, took Asaph to his own house and fed and clothed him in rich apparel. The first day the king gave audience to his people the captain presented Asaph to him. At a sign from his protector he prostrated himself to the floor. Nebuchadnezzar extended his scepter for him to arise. When he stood before his feet all the glory of his transcendant beauty and his fair proportions struck the king's eye with amazement and pleasure, for of all the kings of the earth Nebuchadnezzar most loved beauty of form and color.

“Speak! what wouldst thou?” he said.

“Oh, king, live forever!” Asaph replied, making a second obeisance. “I would serve thee, oh, Nebuchadnezzar. My mother is a captive Israelite. I would be near her and live in Babylon.”

The king smiled at this unusual speech that would have cost others dearly; but Asaph's golden hair, his glorious beauty drove all other thoughts from Nebuchadnezzar's breast save pleasure at the sight.

“Art thou not also a captive?” he asked.

“Nay, great king. I came to thee voluntarily, walking all the weary way.”

Nebuchadnezzar's brow darkened.

“Art thou the treacherous Zedekiah's son?” he asked.

“Nay, oh, king, I am a friend of Jeremiah and servant of the great Jehovah. I drew not a single bow against thy men of war.”

The king's brow cleared again, and his admiration for

Asaph increased each moment—for Nebuchadnezzar could love long and tenderly those who were truly his friends, and he could hate as long and bitterly those who had proved false to him.

The king looked at him in silence, scanning him from head to foot.

“Thou art a young god in beauty!” at last he cried enthusiastically. Then noticing the scar: “But what has thus marred thy fair face?”

For a moment Asaph drooped his head, then said:

“Oh, king, as a little child they would pass me through the fire to Moloch; but my mother saved me.”

“Those Jews were a cruel people. The worship of our gods is not so sanguinary. Thy mother did well to save thee for my service.” Then turning to the captain he said: “’Tis well.”

Nebuzar-adan felt a thrill of joy, for that was praise enough.

“Take the young man to thy house. Stay—what is thy name?”

“Asaph, oh, king!” he replied.

“It has a pleasant sound. I will not change it.”

The audience was ended, so Asaph made obeisance and departed with his new friend.

With an absolute monarch like Nebuchadnezzar everything is possible that is achievable by human ingenuity or intellect or unlimited power; so Helali was soon found and installed with Asaph in the royal palace, surrounded by every luxury and attention.

The venerable Shalmai was given a place of honor, and Asaph was his friend during the rest of his life.

Each day the affection of Nebuchadnezzar for Asaph seemed to increase, for he was in the very flower of his youth and beauty, so he almost immediately appointed him one of his outriders.

Dressed in magnificent garments, with his beautiful hair falling below his shoulders and profusely powdered with gold dust, riding on a spirited horse with the other youths, each morning he preceded the king in his daily drives. The sight was so entrancingly beautiful that people flocked to their doors and gave thanks to all their gods for being permitted to behold it, then sighed as the cavalcade swept on into the distance and was lost to view.

The king would scarcely ever let Asaph leave his presence, so made him one of his cup-bearers also; he seemed to delight in the admiration he excited; and it was indeed a picture worthy to be preserved for all time. Asaph's fair angelic beauty standing out like an ideal sun-god's against the dusky, brilliant, fascinating splendor of the thrice-handsome Nebuchadnezzar, with his hair black and shining as the raven's wing, arranged in stately curls, his beard of the same hue and waving almost to his waist, and his eyes cruel and black when angry, but with those he loved soft and tender as a mother's.

The king never allowed him to accompany him on his war expeditions.

"No, no," he would say, "thou hast had hurt enough; remain to glad my sight on my return."

Everything possible to make Asaph happy and content-

ed was done by both king and officers; but he had a pain in his heart nothing could assuage—he was ignorant of the fate of his loved princess—whether she was yet living, a captive with her uncle, or carried off by some of the brutal allies, or dead, he could not ascertain.

Day by day, as he rode before the king, he scrutinized each face in the hope of seeing hers he loved; but each day he was disappointed of his hope. Half the night he took from sleep and wandered disguised through the various quarters assigned to his exiled people. He listened to every plaintive cry of the homesick Israelites sighing for their beautiful mountains and almost cursing the hot level plains of Babylon, still he heard no speech that thrilled him with the sweet sound of Elia's voice.

Knowing how the king hated Zedekiah, he dared not mention one of the royal family, so he searched all alone and with a breaking heart; yet before the king he must ever be smiling and happy.

About this time Nebuchadnezzar had an immense beautiful golden image constructed and set up in the plain of Dura, near Babylon. He was a restless, ambitious man, always desiring some greater god to worship. The preparations for the dedication of this image were of unusual magnitude and grandeur, and all the princes and people were summoned to be present and take part in its worship. But Asaph determined he would lose his life before he would thus insult the true God. So when the magnificent festival was at its height the herald cried:

“To you it is commanded, oh, people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet,

flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up. And whoso falleth not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast in the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

Then the music sounded, and all bowed and worshiped, even the Jews, save only a few.

But Asaph, on whom the king leaned, being somewhat shorter in stature, stood erect to support him, and no one noticed.

But the native princes were jealous of the power possessed by some of the captive race, and accused them before the king, and they were condemned to a terrible punishment.

But God was with them, and used the miraculous escape of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as a means to enlighten Nebuchadnezzar as to the true God, and for awhile he worshiped the great Jehovah; but he had not attained as yet to a true understanding of the Most High, and his lapses to idolatry were numerous.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LION HUNT.—THE ARENA.

STILL no news of Elia came to the waiting, watching Asaph. Helah sympathized with her son, for she too loved the gentle beautiful princess.

Each night before his search began he would visit his mother and tell her the news of the day, and ascertain from her aught that had occurred of interest to either of them, or that would give him any hope of ultimate success in his weary search.

One day the palace was in a state of subdued excitement, for the king was going hunting, and extra preparations were being made. All the young men composing his outriders were each one busy with several attendants combing their hair out from its curl till it lay in waves upon their shoulders, then powdering it profusely with fine gold dust, painting their faces both red and white, and rubbing their bodies with rich, sweet-scented unguents, placing their finest ear-rings in their ears, and dressing them in their most magnificent apparel.

The king's robes were embroidered and fringed till not a spot remained unadorned; his high head-dress was a mass of gold and jeweled work, with several flying horned horses in filigree around the crown.

Nebuchadnezzar dearly loved this regal display when he

drove through the streets of Babylon, "the city which is the delight of mine eyes."

How gloriously did Asaph's beauty show by contrast with these bepainted youths! And as the splendid cavalcade swept through the palace gates, to the flourish of trumpets and the plaudits of the people, Nebuchadnezzar's heart swelled with love for the beautiful boy. On they dashed, through the fine, broad streets, the populace lining the way, and cheering as they passed, for all loved or respected the king—even the Jews, finding him a lenient master and well disposed toward the flower of Israel, gave him just praise.

They crossed the Euphrates on the great bridge, then passed out of one of the hundred gates—the Gate of Nein—on, on into the wilderness.

Asaph rode near to the chariot's side. Nebuchadnezzar looked upon him as almost a being from another world, for he had heard the story of his descent from the sons of God, and his beauty, purity, and goodness were all factors to enhance the king's regard.

On still further into the wilderness, still no game appeared. Asaph left the chariot's side for a moment, and gave a low, peenliar cry. After a pause he repeated it, but unobserved by all; then from the forest came a low roar; another cry from Asaph, then a magnificent lion slowly emerged from the wilderness, looking about as if seeking for its mate, whose cry of distress Asaph had so well imitated.

In a moment the outriders parted to the right and left, and Nebuchadnezzar and Asaph swept to the front.

Again Asaph repeated the cry, then let the king advance alone to have all the glory of the capture, for he had said at first sight of the lion:

“ I will not kill so glorious a beast, but only wound and bind him.”

Nebuchadnezzar drew a steady bow, and his aim was sure. Quickly the dart transfixed the lion's paw, and held him to the ground. The king leaped from his chariot, and throwing several cords about the beast, soon had him bound and helpless. He was placed in a separate chariot, the driver of which proceeded immediately behind the king.

This was glory enough for one day, so Nebuchadnezzar gave orders for the return. An outrider hastened with all speed back to the city, and informed the officers and people of the great event.

When the king entered the gates of Babylon, it was as if he had returned triumphant from the wars; the whole city came forth to meet and cheer him and throw flowers in his way. The eunuchs and chief officers of the king's household, wishing to show their admiration for his wonderful prowess in capturing alive the magnificent king of beasts, also wishing to flatter him in a new and most unique manner, presented an humble petition, asking for permission to erect a temporary building* where the lion could be exhibited to his delighted people, and that for once those condemned to the lion's den might be given a chance to fight for their lives in public.

* This is an historical liberty, as it was several hundred years after that the first amphitheater was built.

Nebuchadnezzar graciously granted this request, and the work progressed rapidly.

In the meantime there was a magnificent festival to Bel-tis, in her beautiful shrine in the immense Temple of Belus. Before the goddess stood two golden lions and two enormous silver serpents, and many seats. Here were crowded the women worshipers, who, no matter how wealthy or how high their social position, were compelled once in their lives to sacrifice their chastity to the first man who threw a silver coin in their lap.* The coin was considered sacred to the goddess, and could not be refused.

The festival progressed with music and merriment, and the coming and going of many strangers attracted by this unique but unchaste custom, and the constant arrival and departure of the women, many coming in conveyances with retinues of attendants, bearing food and change of apparel—as all were compelled to remain till the goddess was obeyed, some, being old or ill-favored, not leaving the Temple for years.

Suddenly, at the first great shrine of Bel, as clouds of incense arose from the thousand talents' worth burned daily, a lovely figure appeared, like an apparition, out of the soft mist. But clinging to its skirts was an Ethiopian, black and shining, but silent with terror.

“No, no!” she cried, as two priestesses attempted to force her up the incline that wound around the seven decreasing elevations that led to the shrines of Bel and Bel-tis, “I will not go. I am a daughter of Zion, a child of Israel. I will not pollute my body by this worship of the

* Rawlinson.

false gods of Babylon! I adore Jehovah alone, the one true God!"

"Impious wretch!" cried one of the priestesses. "How darest thou thus slander our great goddess? Thy mouth should burn with thy words!"

And she struck her on her tender lips till the blood trickled down in a little stream and fell upon her garments.

"I will not—no, I will not thus break the pure laws of our most gracious God! I will not shame the name of our poor captive people!"

"Aha! thou art a captive Jewess, and thus defy our sacred rites! There is a way to make thee submit—the fiery furnace, the lion's den!" cried the priestess.

"The fiery furnace would be a bed of roses compared to the wickedness of this worship of thy detested goddess, the embrace of the lion kindness to that to which thou wouldst have me submit!"

"No, no; no burn up in furnace. Cleo die!—no let lion eat up pretty white flesh!"

"Impious, impious!" shrieked the priestess. "Thou wast born under an evil star, and on an unlucky day!"

Then, as they obstructed the way and the crowd began to laugh, she beckoned to a priest, and said:

"Take this wretch away and put her in a dungeon until the furnace is prepared or the lions ready!"

"Thrice-welcome death!" the maiden cried, as she was borne away, the Ethiopian shrieking wildly and tearing her garments.

At length the day arrived for the public spectacle to the king and people. All the city was in a state of wild enjoyment; houses, temples, palaces, were all decorated with the utmost splendor, for it was the king's birthday, and all wished to do honor to the occasion.

In the amphitheater, tier on tier of faces arose from the floor to the height of the great wall; all Babylon would have been present had it been possible.

The great Nebuchadnezzar, with his beloved wife, Amytis, and his son, Enil-Merodach, together with his especial favorites and guards, occupied a special portion decorated with banners and ensigns of Babylonia placed above the beautiful captured insignia of his many vassals.

Asaph, pale and sad, stood by the king's side. He had heard some slight intimation that the games were to be cruel, and perhaps blood would be shed, and he whose heart was so gentle could not contemplate the sufferings of others, or of even poor dumb animals, without his own heart enduring all their pain.

Inspiring music made glad the vast assemblage, and from the elegantly dressed people the intoxicating perfume from delicate unguents filled the air.

With a flourish of trumpets the games commenced. There was wrestling, vaulting, running, and jumping by those skilled in these arts, both among the native youths and those of the many captured nations. These sports were much enjoyed by the spectators, as each was "on his mettle" to do his very best before such an illustrious assemblage. Asaph's heart beat fast, and ever and anon he could almost fancy himself one of the contestants, espe-

cially as they sped around the arena fleet as the wind. He, too, joined in the applause, giving a sigh of relief, thinking the exhibition was to end in these peaceful games. But the hush of expectation that fell upon the audience told him something more exciting was to come.

The music burst forth in the strains of a national hymn. Now they knew what was coming.

“The lion! the lion!” they shouted, and the excitement knew no bounds.

Several gaudily dressed attendants entered from a side door, bearing a great wooden cage; they placed it in the arena in full view of the people; then one mounted on top of it, and remained like a statue. It contained the captured lion. Suddenly a herald came from an opposite door, and stood in the arena; he blew a shrill blast upon the trumpet, then cried:

“Oh, king, live forever! One of the meanest of thy slaves has dared to defy thy power, neither worshiping thy great image on the plain, nor giving tribute to our good Beltis. She scandalized the service of the goddess and brought our religion into contempt. She has been condemned by divine command to punishment by furnace or by beasts.

“But, oh, king of all the earth, knowing thy wondrous kindness, we ask thy permission to grant this maiden a chance of life, even with the lion thou hast caught, or that one fight for her who feels inclined!”

The king extended his scepter, and plaudits filled the air. Ah! now there will be fine sport, for there was

enough natural cruelty in this bitter hasty nation to enjoy the contest even to the shedding of blood.

Again the herald blew the trumpet, then opening a door close to the lion's cage he led forth a most lovely maiden dressed in flowing white robes, with her black hair falling nearly to her feet, and, clinging to her like her shadow, the Ethiopian slave—it was the Princess Elia and the faithful Cleo.

Asaph started back in terror. It was the Princess Elia. All the blood left his face and he shook like one with ague.

Again the herald sounded the trumpet and cried:

“Oh, king! live forever, and oh, all ye people! will one from among your number, moved by the compassion of the gods, encounter the noble beast to save this fair captive maiden?”

Quick as a flash, Asaph stripped from his shoulders his garments of state, ran to the separating wall, and vaulted over it like a trained athlete.

Standing in the center of the arena, with his bow and arrows in his hands—which he had concealed—he cried:

“I, Asaph, the Israelite, will fight for the captive maiden!”

Nebuchadnezzar turned ashy pale. Should the boy he so loved be torn to pieces for a worthless slave? He was about to cry out in his agony to let the slave go free and save the youth, when suddenly the princess and the herald having retired to their places, the attendant on the top of the cage raised the barred gate, and the lion came forth.

For a moment Asaph gazed into his eyes; the vast assemblage held their breath from fear; then, uttering a low

cry, he turned suddenly and ran. For a moment the lion stood still, but Asaph repeated the cry still louder, and with a roar the lion followed fast upon his track.

The people all loved the beautiful youth, and their spirits fell as they saw him thus turn and run, without one effort to save his life.

On and on he ran around the arena, then around again; no racer in the games had made such time. Still on and on, the lion gaining slowly but surely; ever and anon the low cry of an animal in distress came from Asaph's lips; the people were so excited they could scarcely keep their seats.

Still on and on—would he never tire? Nearer and nearer came the lion; yet faster and faster flew the boy, till his feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth. With terrific roars the lion made greater efforts, swaying his great, shaggy head from side to side. Ah! a few more steps, and there would be a bloody corpse upon the sand!

Nearer and nearer came the beast, till Asaph could feel his panting breath upon his limbs. Suddenly he caught a portion of Asaph's garment and tore it with his cruel fangs. A great sob went up from the people. Nebuchadnezzar turned the hue of a corpse, and the princess from her door, where she could see it all, gave a loud shriek of despair that rang through the vast amphitheater.

But Asaph sprung lightly aside and countermarched upon the lion, who continued his way, roaring and shaking his mane.

His impetus had been so great that he had finished the

circuit of the arena before he seemed to realize that his prey had escaped him.

Asaph, slowing his paces to a walk, awaited the approach of the infuriated beast, who, catching sight of him, again advanced with renewed roars of anger. Asaph affixed an arrow to his bow, and calmly drew the string, then another, and another, and the king of beasts lay dead by the princess's door, transfixcd by three arrows through his heart.

Asaph opened the door, and taking Elia by the hand, he cried:

“Oh, king, live forever! Grant me of thy mercy this maiden's life!”

Nebuchadnezzar, as with a sob of joy, extended his scepter, and the vast assemblage shouted till the walls of Babylon gave back the sound again and again like rolling thunder.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ASAPH WEDS THE PRINCESS.

AT the palace there was a great feast, and all was happiness. The king's strong nature gave every evidence of his joy at the safety of his loved Asaph. From his peculiar golden hair and radiantly fair skin all the princes and officers and eunuchs of the court looked at him as outside the pale of their petty jealousy, as a being really descended from the gods, so they revered him as well as loved him, and all rejoiced that he had escaped the fangs of the fierce lion.

Amyitis was almost as glad as the king himself.

“How brave thou wert, my pretty boy; when the lion tore thy garment my heart gave a great bound, for I did not think thou wert such a master of the art as to be able to deceive the king of beasts himself.”

And so they all praised him; and his mother looked glad and happy.

To-night Asaph was unusually joyous. He had found his princess, and had saved her life. When Nebuchadnezzar was leaning on his loved cup-bearer's arm and speaking to him gently, his heart being glad with wine, Asaph told him of his love for the princess, and asked his permission to espouse her.

The king was silent for awhile, then said:

“So that is the reason thou hast often looked sad? Will she take thy heart away from thy king?”

“Nay, oh, king. I worship thee forever, as the sun that brightens all my life. Thou wilt have two to love and serve thee now in place of one.”

After a pause Nebuchadnezzar said:

“Wouldst thou forego the custom of thy people and ask not the year of rest from attendance on the lord thy king?”

“Most willingly, oh, king! A year without the light of thy countenance would be a year of darkness to thy servant.”

The king smiled.

“Be it as thou wishest, and according to thine own customs; but I will have the ceremonies with such grandeur as befits a favorite of the king and a princess of royal blood.”

Then the music burst forth, and the singers and dancers appeared, and so amusements followed close upon each other till all were summoned to the magnificent banquetting chambers, and there they remained till the stars grew dim.

* * * * *

Asaph could neither interpret dreams nor foretell events by the configuration of the stars, but he could answer the king in his own language in chosen befitting words, and could make his heart glad with a seraphic smile or sad with a look of sorrow.

He never disputed with the wise Chaldeans; and even the dignified Daniel looked upon him as scarce more than

a pretty boy, but deep in Asaph's heart was a yearning to enlighten his captive brethren, to instill into their minds a greater reverence for the true God, a clearer idea of His mercy and goodness, to arouse them from the apathy into which they had often fallen by the almost impossibility of being perfect in practice in the stern school of the Mosaic dispensation of the law. But his attendance was so constant that he could not fulfill his heart's desire; but many times late into the night he would lay prostrate on the floor of his chamber and pray for light to the great Jehovah.

Asaph often passed the royal prison, where the gentle Jehoiakim and Zedekiah resided, and where a certain amount of liberty was allowed them—for the king did not forget they were of the royal blood. One day, as they were walking in the small garden, the poor blind Zedekiah, leaning on the arm of the young king, Asaph paused at the iron-barred gate. The sentinell advanced.

"I would speak a moment to the captives," Asaph said; and as the man recognized the king's cup-bearer, he withdrew a pace. "King Jehoiakim," called Asaph, softly.

"Who calls?" asked Zedekiah, with the quicker ear of the blind.

"Asaph, who brought thee food in Jerusalem."

Jehoiakim turned quickly.

"Oh, king, thy sister is alive and well. We are to wed. The great Nebuchadnezzar has sanctioned it; dost thou consent?"

"What, the Moloch boy?" he replied, in astonishment.

“No, the king’s cup-bearer. I saved her life from the cruel lion. We love each other; and thy consent will make us still more happy, and thine too, oh, Zedekiah.”

“What matters the consent of two poor prisoners, one with blinded eyes who can never look upon thy face again, yet I remember it was a kindly face. And thou art rich and honored now, while I am but a captive slave.” And Jehoiakim bowed his head.

“Thy consent, oh, kings! We will remember thee in all our prayers to the God of Israel,” said Asaph, softly.

“Thou hast it, boy,” they replied, “and may Jehovah smile upon you both.”

“Peace be upon you now and forever,” Asaph replied softly, then moved away.

The marriage of Asaph and the Princess Elia was celebrated with the utmost magnificence, and the festivities were kept up for many days, and Asaph was in the fullness of his happiness. Helah nightly gave thanks to Jehovah for the one loved son that He had given her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S MADNESS.

YEARS passed away. Asaph still waited on the king; sons and daughters were born to him, and he was honored and respected.

The captive Israelites in and around Babylon were slowly but surely turning again to the true God. Asaph believing that old customs and traditions were passing away, and that this very captivity was to work out Jehovah's plan of turning the whole world to His knowledge and worship, taught the Jews secretly in the underground hidden places, many of which were built for cool retreats during the torrid heat of summer.

A number of Israelites of advanced opinions were accustomed to come each night and listen to him and treasure each word that fell from his lips as though from a prophet's.

One night an ancient asked him:

"Master, why in our father's time was the least ignorant infringement of the law so severely punished?"

"The law is unchangeable and inexorable now and forever, since the beginning, knowing neither mercy, pity, nor compassion; certain consequences followed, and still their breaking, and no one can escape their effects save by Divine interposition. If a man falls from a great height the law of force causes him injuries of which he may die.

Should a heavy substance strike him in a vital part, even in his eagerness and joy to serve Jehovah, he may die—as witness Uzzah trying to steady the ark, which, according to the light I have so prayed to receive, was not punished for good intentions; but the law of force was violated by his coming too near in his eagerness, and, being struck by the heavy cart, died. Our early history is so wrapped in mystery and myths that it is difficult to know the true from the false, yet I think we may be safe in believing that God would not make a law and give it to His people with all solemnity, and almost immediately ask them to break it.”

“ Oh, rabbi, master, why did the great Jehovah punish our fathers so terribly for desiring other food than manna, of which their human appetite had sickened?”

“ According to my light, they eat to such excess—even birds raw, and with the blood—that sickness ensued for thus violating the laws of health.”

“ Why, oh, master, were they punished so terribly for their commerce with strange women?”

“ It was the consequence of the violated law of chastity that caused their sickness and death.”

At another time they asked him: “ Why, oh, master, did Jehovah require so many offerings and sacrifices of animals and incense upon His altars?”

“ Our kind, compassionate God hath Himself said that in the wilderness He required neither sacrifices nor offerings; but when our fathers came into the Promised Land they who had never witnessed the idol worship of fair

Egypt saw idolatry on every side where gifts of every description were offered to the gods for protection, intercession, or vengeance on their foes. To give gifts to those we love or revere, or whose good offices we wish to propitiate, is inherent in human nature. Our Father, to whom all hearts are as open books, to lead them gently back from this idolatry to which they were rapidly turning, encouraged them to transfer their worship from the false to the true God without a violent change in form; then many of the sacrifices were for His priests and their families' support. The killing of cattle in sight of or by the priest was that it should be mercifully accomplished without unnecessary cruelty to the beasts, of whom God Himself is tender, 'tempering the wind to the shorn lamb,' and noticing a sparrow that falls to the ground. Also that it should be performed in such a manner as was for the best health of those who eat."

"But why the incense, good master?"

"Besides being pleasant to both God and man, it was healthy, and helped to kill the germs of sickness engendered by the shedding of so much blood in one locality, and to correct the disagreeable odor of the burning flesh."

"Should we still offer these things to our God, oh, master?"

"According to the light of faith. our compassionate One hath given us a silent guide--the still, small voice of conscience. Follow it, and we shall never err; for it ever breathes forth God's laws of love and kindness to our neighbors--nay, even to our enemy."

Again, on another night, they asked him:

“ Oh, rabbi, master, wouldst thou have us put aside all our ceremonies and festivals?”

“ Nay, not so; many are held in grateful remembrance of Jehovah’s mercies to His chosen people. Keep them by way of thanks and rejoicing. Do we not keep our domestic feasts when a child is born, and many other days in the progress of its life? We do these for love and gladness to the creature, how much more should we do for the Creator?”

* * * * *

And so the years passed away. Asaph’s children were growing up, lovely in face and gentle in disposition. It was a pleasant sight to see the five little maidens with fair, long hair like their father, and the seven sturdy boys with the handsome Jewish features of their mother, and Helah lived her youth over again with such blessed young companions.

But now came sadness to Asaph’s gentle heart. The king, great Nebuchadnezzar, whom he had so learned to love, was warned by a dream, which was interpreted by the wise Daniel, of his strange approaching madness; then Daniel fearlessly exhorted him to break off his sins and show mercy to the poor.

For a whole year Asaph feared each moment the fulfillment of the dream, for Daniel had never erred in such interpretations.

At last one day, as Nebuchadnezzar was walking in his palace, leaning on Asaph’s arm, he looked from this high ground over his beautiful city—the city that had so astonished the Israelites by its magnificence that they had

almost ceased to grieve for their own land. There, on the one hand, was the gorgeous Temple of Bel-Merodach and the smaller palace; there the Euphrates flashing in the sun; nearer, the beautiful hanging gardens he had built for his loved Amyitis towered in the air; there the great pools and canals he had built; yonder, in the distance, the vast fields and forests inclosed within the city's mighty walls; each house and palace had its beautiful garden, and the picture might well excite his pride—he who had done so much for Babylon in the art of beautiful and stupendous building, painting, sculpture, and the sister arts and sciences. So he exclaimed, with perhaps too much pride for one whom God had so helped to prosper, and taking too much credit to himself for that which, without Divine aid, he could never have accomplished:

“Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”*

Then the voice of his doom broke from the clouds, and the king went mad.

Away off those beautiful fields, where he had gazed with delight a few moments before, he was driven on his hands and feet like a beast of the wilderness, and Asaph tended him day and night.

He would eat no food but grass and edible roots that grew in the fields, and his robes were torn to shreds, and his hair grew long also upon his poor body, and his nails became claws. But Asaph kept him out of the sight of men, and wept and prayed continually.

* Daniel, iv Chapter, 30 verse.

The beauty of his majesty was changed; he knew not those he loved, and Asaph's task made lines of sorrow on his glorious beauty.

Thus seven years passed away, when one morning, as Asaph was on his knees praying, he noticed the king standing upright and watching him. Suddenly Nebuchadnezzar fell down beside him and cried:

“I bless the Most High, and I praise and honor Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What dost thou?”*

Asaph fell on his face, and gave thanks to God for the king's return to reason. He dressed him in his kingly garments, and arranged his hair and made him like himself again.

The Babylonians received their recovered king with delight, and his reign was brighter and happier than ever, for now he believed in the one true God, and tried to turn his people to the same faith, and glory and honors accumulated unto him.

Not long after he fell asleep, full of years† and great works, such a king as the world had never seen before, and such a one as it will not see in time to come.

Nebuchadnezzar was buried with great magnificence, and odors and spices were burned for him, and all Babylon mourned for many days.

* Daniel, vi Chapter, 31 verse.

† About eighty.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HAGGITH WARNS ASAPH OF THE CONSPIRACY.

AFTER the magnificent ceremonies of mourning for the king, great Nebuchadnezzar, and the scarcely less imposing splendors of the coronation of his son Enil-Merodach, had passed, Babylon resumed its usual appearance.

Asaph had been the loved darling of the great king, his plaything, his beautiful boy; but he was loved by his son as a companion, and from his earliest residence at the palace he had spent a few moments each day with the gentle Enil-Merodach. Together they had visited the young imprisoned kings, and when poor, blind Zedekiah had sickened and died, and Nebuchadnezzar had given him a grand funeral, as became a king, the two young friends had wept bitterly, and then taken the young Jeconiah into their hearts, and all these years they had been fast but secret friends.

Now, when Enil-Merodach came to the great dignity of reigning over mighty Babylon, his first thought was of his friends. He advanced Asaph to the highest honors, and liberated Jeconiah from prison, and did all in his power to make him forget his unhappy past and the injustice done him; so he set his throne above all the other captive kings, and showed him much honor.

Many of the Babylonians had turned to God after the miraculous conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, so these gentle

friends passed many hours together, conversing about the wonderful, the merciful Jehovah, and how to continue His work. Elia would steal in and with one hand in her brother's clasp, and the other in her husband's, she was a happy woman, and her radiant face inspired them to noble deeds and thrice-noble thoughts.

But this happiness was not destined to be of long duration, for many of the Babylonians were jealous and envious of the favorites, and stirred up the people against them.

The king was accused of many things foreign to his gentle nature, and a conspiracy was formed against his life.

One night, when Asaph was teaching the Jews and the secret converts among the Babylonians in one of the hidden underground places—for the greater part of the people despised the religion and practices of the Hebrews, so they had to be extremely cautious lest a disaffected person should gain an entrance and betray them—a peculiar knock was heard.

It was midnight; the lesson was ended, and all were prostrate on the floor in prayer. In a moment they were on their feet with drawn swords in their hands.

“ 'Tis not the perfect knock, oh, master!” said a dark-skinned Chaldean.

The knock was repeated. After a pause, Asaph said:

“ Who is it that wishes entrance here?”

“ I would speak with Asaph, the Israelite, oh, master!” replied a woman's voice.

In a moment the swords were sheathed and the door unbarred. A veiled figure entered.

"I would speak with thee alone," she said, her exposed eyes glancing in fear at the others.

At a motion from Asaph they stole silently away, and they two were alone.

Throwing her veil from her face, she said:

"Dost thou not know me, master?"

Asaph looked at her searchingly, then slowly shook his head.

"Ay! I'm not the comely damsel I was when I sold flowers in the market-place," she said, with a short, bitter laugh.

"Haggith!"

"Ay, thou mayst well look in pity on my poor scarred face! I've had a hard master, and for years have been a prisoner. But 'tis not of that I would speak. Thou art the friend of the king. His life is in danger!"

"Ah! How knowest thou that?"

"My master had company at his house to-night. While serving wine, I heard thy name mentioned, and when he saw me listening he drove me from the room with blows; but I hid and heard all their wicked plans. They are going to kill the king, and thy life, too, is in danger. They spoke the day and the hour, but I could not understand all the words in their cursed heathen tongue. But hasten, for it may even now be too late!"

"How didst thou find me?"

"Dost forget? I loved thee once; 'tis no sin to tell thee now, with this marred face and whitening hair. He

did it when I was young, in jealous rage. Ah! but he is a brutal master! I escaped him, though, to save thy life; but—”

She tottered and would have fallen but he caught her and thus discovered her arm was broken.

“ ’Tis nothing. I did not know the window was so high.”

“ Come, Haggith, to where I live, and thou shalt have my good wife’s tenderest care.”

“ What! The Princess Elia! Nay, nay! I will go back to my brute; I am used to him, and—and— But hasten thou!”

“ Come, poor Haggith!”

“ Nay, I will not. Save thy friend. Farewell!”

And she was gone out into the midnight darkness.

Asaph hurried to the palace. He had not forgotten the trick of his boyhood, and ran like a deer.

It was past midnight, and the palace was in utter darkness, save the windows of the king’s chamber.

Asaph hurried to a secret door, known only to himself and a few trusted friends of the king. As he traversed the long, dark passages that led to it he heard subdued sounds of strife, which increased as he came nearer.

“ Help, help! in Jehovah’s name!”

It was the voice of the king, but no one answered, no help came.

“ Where are the guards?” Asaph muttered. “ Oh, God! oh, Father, help! Are they all turned traitors?”

Now he was at the door, but it resisted all his efforts to open it. The cries of distress were more pitiful. What

should he do? In the dark it was difficult to find the secret spring, but love quickened all his senses, and when the despairing cry of "Asaph, my friend, save me!" came to his ears, he struck his body with all his force against the door; it yielded, and in a moment he had entered and thrown himself in front of the king, who was defending himself against several assailants, conspirators against his life and throne, the chief of whom Asaph instantly recognized.

"Ah, Neriglissar, thou traitor! Wouldst kill thy lord and brother?"

With that he seized a triangular stool, the legs of which were heavily incased with gold, and struck at him. He sprung quickly aside, but did not altogether escape the blow, which fell on his left hand, making him wild with pain.

"Ha! the curse of Nebo light on thee, thou impious Israelite!" he cried, striking wildly with his sword, which, being short, failed to do Asaph any injury.

"How darest thou, slave, to raise thy hand against our leader?" cried Nabonardius, aiming a fierce blow at Asaph's still glorious, golden-wreathed head; but he was as agile as in the days of his youth, so, dropping the stool, he grasped his assailant before he recovered from the impetus of his unavailing blow, and threw him to the floor. Then the other assailants rushed to the rescue and Asaph and Enil-Merodach had to use all their force to defend themselves. But they were so valiant and held their lives so dear that for awhile the contest seemed doubtful.

Asaph had never weakened himself with wine and

women, and had never ceased since his boyhood to exercise each day, so that he was a match for more than one of these Babylonians whose constant drunken revels had weakened and enervated them.

Again and again he threw one of the conspirators, then seizing the stool, he struck right and left and called:

“Escape, oh, king! thy enemies are well-nigh vanquished!”

But before Enil-Merodach could reach the secret door, several of the conspirators had revived from the confusion of their blows and rushed after the fleeing king. Asaph threw himself before him, but quick as a flash Neriglissar thrust his short, thick sword between Asaph’s arm and body, cutting his flesh and pinning the king to the wall.

“Escape—I die!” cried the king, falling forward, dead. Asaph paused a moment in horror at the sight, then cried:

“The vengeance of Jehovah light on thee forever, thou impious murderer!” and disappeared through the secret door, which closed fast behind him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A NEW MYSTERY.

FROM this time Asaph disappeared from public sight together with his wife and family and his choicest household treasures.

Day and night the conspirators sought for him, but in vain, and Neriglissar now being king, chafed and fretted on his throne.

Asaph had taken up his abode in one of those underground places that he knew so well, and had had it enlarged and beautified, but the entrance he kept secret by blindfolding the workmen. Many a night he sallied forth, disguised, and no man knew him.

Once in his early manhood Nebuchadnezzar had allowed him, as a great favor, to go to Egypt for a short time, and there he had visited Jeremiah and obtained from him copies of his prophecies and fragments of the writings of those who had preceded him. Since his friend, "the great king's" death, having his time less peremptorily demanded, he had studied these writings night and day.

One night, after many months of thought and prayer over certain passages, when he was well-nigh worn out and exhausted with his mental efforts to dispel the darkness that hung over the words so that he should understand them as the great Jehovah intended, his mind became suddenly illuminated, a glorious refulgence seemed to fill

his soul, and his whole life became transfigured, and his ecstasy was too great to be borne alone, so he hastened to his beloved Elia and initiated her into this grand mystery. Then his heart yearned for his captive brethren to receive the glorious tidings, and to enjoy with him the blessings of this everlasting hope.

He went among them secretly, enjoining the greatest caution, for this blessed mystery, too great and marvelous for aught but graybeards to understand, must not be hidden any more in dark receptacle of moldy books for fear of their stern masters, warned by babbling tongues. No, the Hope was for them and those who would believe with them; but in the gladness of their hearts they must not be too free.

It was the mystery of mysteries they were about to learn—the name they had been taught in their childhood as too sacred and awful to utter even to the winds was to become manifest in the flesh.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“THE WEDGE OF GOLD.”

THREE years passed on. Neriglissar had added new beauties to the great city, especially in his grand palace, one of the most superb buildings ever erected. Dying in peace with the surrounding country, he left his kingdom to his son Laborosoarchod, a young boy of quick, passionate temper. As his father had obtained his throne by treachery and murder, so his son lost his power and life by the same means. A feeble pretext of his bad disposition gave his enemies an opportunity of torturing him to death by beating, and placing the arch-conspirator Nabonardius upon the throne.

These events were watched closely by the hiding, busy Asaph, who was eagerly expecting the coming of the “wedge of gold” who was to rebuild his sacredly loved Temple, and send his captive nation back to dear Jerusalem laden with gifts of gold and many precious things.

The new light he had received and was trying with all the energy of conviction to disseminate among his brethren had convulsed the Jewish people to the foundation of their faith; some believed and some were ready to pour the molten fire of their wrath on Asaph’s devoted head. But he did not flinch; ever gentle, ever consistent, he would press his arguments, read to them the prophecies, pray and exhort, still the believers were but few.

“What will this mystery do for us here in Babylon?” some cried. “Will the sweat pour less from our brows by the diminishing of our labor, or will our food be more plenteous and dainty?” “Will our country be restored to us?” cried others.

“Wait, wait till the coming of God’s Shepherd; He will restore us our glory; then we will worship the great Jehovah in His own Temple; only wait, dear brothers.”

This was Asaph’s constant entreaty.

“Wait! wait! That is still thy cry! We are tired of it; the grave itself will receive our worn-out bodies before that time.”

“Yes, if thy new-found mystery could ease us from our present troubles, it were well to hearken and believe; but to wait and watch and suffer for a myth, no, no.”

And some would curse him; and but for his calm dignity would have plucked him by the beard. Still he did not cease from His Father’s work, for was he not one of the sons of God?

Years passed on. Rumors of war filled the air, and with them came the name of Cyrus.

“Ah! the wedge of gold!” cried Asaph.

Now nightly the place of meeting was crowded by the half-believing Israelites. The old men faintly remembered years and years ago hearing of the Prophet Isaiah, and when Asaph read his writings to them, mentioning the very name of their deliverer, their old eyes sparkled, and the younger ones soon caught their enthusiasm, and so it spread and spread, so that soon there was fifty thousand disaffected people in and around Babylon who wished suc-

cess to the Persian king. Still years passed away before any decisive battle was fought. Babylon was fortified so strongly that it seemed impossible to the waiting Israelites that their deliverer could ever enter to set them free; but their prophet had foretold this very name over two hundred years before, so they believed and worshiped God and waited.

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Night had fallen on Babylon, so beautiful, so peaceful that no one would have believed that outside her walls a mighty army was creeping to her overthrow.

The palace windows sparkled with light, and inside all was joy and revelry. But the young king—associate with his father on the throne—was impious in his vanity of power, for his father was absent defending some other portion of his kingdom; so ordering the holy vessels of the Temple service to be brought, he laughed and drank wine out of their sacred depths and gave them to his favorites and concubines, and the jests and mirth ran high, and they derided the God of Israel, and laughed Him to scorn—for this was a great religious festival—and thus the king sought to please his gods.

Suddenly the terrible fingers wrote upon the wall “Mene, mene, tekem, upharsin!” The light from the candles shone upon the words brighter and brighter until they seemed to be written in letters of fire.

The king was frightened. What could this mean? His great Nebo, or Morodach, or Bel, had never thus proclaimed their wishes, or given forth their prophecies. He immediately consulted his magicians, soothsayers, and wise

men. His priests too were celebrating this great festival in different parts of the city, but most of them were wild with religious frenzy, or sunk in drunken folly with the people, so he obtained no answer to his anxious inquiries.

At last the old queen mother Nitocris bade Belshazzar summon the wise Daniel. He came, and courteously declining all gifts, revealed to the terrified king that his power had departed, and his kingdom was at an end—for Daniel knew by his prophets that Cyrus was to be their deliverer, and this the year of the long looked-for event.

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High upon an embankment stood a majestic figure, with flowing hair and beard, watching the silent city. The noise of revelry had gradually ceased as the votaries had sunk in drunken stupor or were busy clearing away the immense amount of food offerings the infatuated people had placed before their gods, and storing them in safety for their own use.

The heart of the silent watcher ached at this universal idolatry, this impiety to his Divine Father—for the heart of Asaph was as tender as of old. Suddenly his gaze became attracted to the great river. What was the matter? The waters were diminishing, not slowly, as by nature, but as if its bottom were a sieve. Should he inform the officers of the guard? Not a single sentry was on duty. Was it the earthquake coming to destroy them all before Cyrus came and set them free?

His gaze was fascinated. Lower and lower sunk the river, and the sounds of revelry ceased one by one till the

silence became oppressive. Lower still the waters fell, till here and there the rocks and rubbish of the bottom shone clearly in the moonlight, and then, as he watched, he saw moving specters arise as it were from the river bed, and gathering at the landing-places, opened the river-gates, and formed into column after column of stalwart, well-armed men!

“ Ah, it is the ‘wedge of gold!’ he cried. “Praised be Jehovah’s name!” and he hastened to meet the Persian monarch. Prostrating himself thrice before him he cried, “Blessed be thou, thou shepherd of the living God! I am thy servant; and thousands of my people will bless thy coming!”

Cyrus accepted this as a good omen, and graciously raised Asaph, assuring him that not one hair of his people should be injured—he was their friend, appointed by God as their deliverer.

But now some of the guards were aroused, and ran with the terrible news to the palace.

Belshazzar was terror-stricken, and repented too late his wicked blasphemy of Israel’s God.

Asaph sped to the Jewish quarters and aroused them, and they notified others, till soon an immense inside army joined their deliverer.

The king in his palace shook with fear. “Mene, mene, takel, upharsin,” rang in his ears; the writing on the wall seared his eyes; his trembling limbs could scarcely support him; the mysterious hand seemed to grasp his heart; the door burst open and the Persian soldiers pierced him with many sword-thrusts through the heart, even where he

stood with the vessels of the Temple service scattered all about him.

Outside the streets were wet with blood, and fires lighted up the sky, and all was horror and confusion.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“THE PRINCE OF PEACE.”

THE Temple had been rebuilt with much pain and anguish and sore disappointments, and the walls of Jerusalem once more shut in the chosen people to worship the great Jehovah after their own hearts and the laws given them by their first leader, the great Moses.

The Feast of Harvest had arrived, and all was peace and joy in dear Jerusalem.

At the door of his cottage sat an old man; his venerable white beard reached far below his waist, and the curls of snow upon his brow were like pale silver aureoles shedding their luster upon all around; at his feet and by his knees his children and children's children stood and listened as he told them yet again the wondrous story. Elia, still the princess, leaned upon his shoulder. Suddenly his face became illuminated, and his voice became as angelic music to their ears.

“Children, believe and teach to our dear people that God will send His Son to redeem the world, and there shall thenceforward be a reign of peace and charity and love; for He that cometh shall be called Wonderful, the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace.”

And thus the gentle Asaph fell asleep.

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